

**THE INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT ON MANAGING
WORKPLACE CONFLICT AT THE DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY**

by

**BRENT DAMIAN TAYLER
19402046**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

MASTER IN MANAGEMENT SCIENCES SPECIALISING IN

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

in the

Department of Human Resources Management

Faculty of Management Sciences

at the

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR M.E. LOURENS

MAY 2025

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the study was to establish the impact of employee engagement (EE) on managing workplace conflict at the Durban University of Technology. The study explores types of EE strategies and the development of policies, procedures and workplace interventions to manage employer-employee conflict. This study is motivated by the global challenges facing higher education institutions in South Africa and the need to make a unique contribution to understanding whether employee engagement can help to reduce workplace conflict in the South African higher education sector, which can have a significant impact on overall institutional performance and harmony. Additionally, there is a dearth of research related to employee engagement in HE and more especially its link to workplace conflict. The study was underpinned by key research objectives such as exploring EE strategies, determining the antecedents of EE and investigating the relationship between EE and workplace conflict at the DUT.

A quantitative approach using a pre-coded structured closed-ended online questionnaire consisting of a 5-point Likert scale was utilised to collect the data from a selected sample of respondents. The target population comprised of 1876 employees at the Durban University of Technology and a sample of 320 employees was selected using a simple random sampling without replacement technique for both academic and non-academic staff. A total of 198 responses were received reflecting a 62% response rate. The Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 for Windows was used for statistical analyses.

The notable findings of the study revealed that employee support, organisational work culture and job stressors are key antecedents of EE, that the antecedents of EE can have either a negative or positive effect on EE and that EE does not have a significant effect on workplace conflict. Other notable findings revealed that EE strategies relating to employee support and positive organisational culture do not have a significant effect on workplace conflict, while job stressors tend to have a positive and significant effect on workplace conflict. Based on the findings of the

study, it can be concluded that EE does not have a significant influence on the management of workplace conflict at the Durban University of Technology. The study recommended that the leadership at the DUT implement EE strategies and interventions to improve EE at the institution. This can be achieved through increased supervisor and organisational support for employees; the development of a strong and positive organisational work culture supporting organisational goals; and reducing job-related stressors negatively impacting EE at the institution. It was further recommended that the institution analyse the antecedents of employee engagement to determine where and how engagement initiatives should be addressed. The study identified areas of possible future research related to EE and workplace conflict including an alternative investigation into the influence of workplace conflict on EE. After the completion of the study, the researcher solicited the services of a senior librarian to run the Turnitin programme to test the thesis for plagiarism. The results yielded a 11% plagiarism report.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DUT	Durban University of Technology
DV	Dependent Variable
DIT	Durban Institute of Technology
EE	Employee Engagement
FTEN	First Time Entering Students
CIPD	Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development
EES	Employee Engagement Scale
GWA	Gallup Workplace Audit
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
IREC	Institutional Research Ethics Committee
IV	Independent Variable
JD-R	Job Demands-Resources
JE	Job Engagement
KZN	Kwa-Zulu Natal
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
NDP	National Development Plan
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
OC	Organisational Commitment
OCB	Organisational Citizenship Behaviour
OE	Organisational Engagement
PE	Personal Engagement
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
UoT	University of Technology
UWES	Utrecht Work Engagement Scale

WC	Workplace Conflict
WE	Work Engagement

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“It always seems impossible until it’s done” – Nelson Mandela.

I am thankful to God for giving me the strength and perseverance to complete this dissertation, for without his help I could not have reached the end of this journey.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Ralph Francis Gabriel Tayler. I miss you, Pops.

DECLARATION

I, Brent Damian Tayler, declare that the dissertation, which I hereby submit for the Degree of master's in management sciences specialising in Human Resource Management in the Faculty of Management Sciences at the Durban University of Technology, is my own original work and has not been submitted at any previous institution of higher education. All the sources that I have acknowledged are accurately cited and referred to in the bibliography list.


Brent Tayler

Student No: 19402046

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is characterised by flexibility, rapid innovation and change. This phenomenon has created synergies of information and communication technology that have penetrated all aspects of life, and traditional services are becoming more and more multidisciplinary, intelligent and agile (Abramovici, Gobel and Neges, 2015 cited in Diedricks, Cilliers and Bezuidenhout, 2019). Higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe have also been affected and are confronted with complex changes and challenges (Arinto, 2013; Guasch, Alvarez and Espasa, 2010; Panda and Mishra, 2007 cited in Diedricks, *et al.*, 2019). Global changes and the evolution of knowledge have influenced the agenda for managing and governing higher education (hereinafter referred to as HE) around the globe. Government involvement in HE has influenced HE policies by requiring them to adopt business-like practices to cope with competition in the global marketplace (Perumal, 2010).

Consequently, HEIs are undergoing rapid shifts to their operations, moving them ever closer to the way traditional business organisations operate, namely for profit (Shin and Harman, 2009 cited in Osam, 2018). Thus, as institutions of higher learning continue to mirror a for-profit operational approach, Human Resource Development (HRD) researchers must begin to consider widening the scope of their scholarly focus to cover the growing needs in HE, especially in the areas of psychological climate and EE, as well as the implications for the health and well-being of their employees (Osam, 2018). However, the growing expectations of stakeholders such as government, industry and community drive the pressure on the restructuring of HE. Rapid globalisation and a strong demand for the development of national economies influence the agenda for social and economic transformation (Perumal, 2010).

Today's higher education sector has endured an age of complex transition caused by constant global changes. Pressure from government, together with the burdensome expectation on academics to contribute in terms of research and development, not only places huge demands on HEIs, but ultimately affects academic staff often confronted with a shortage of resources while being exposed to various work demands (Theron, 2022).

In the context of developing nations, the loss of learning as a result of numerous problems is the main concern of policymakers, educators and other stakeholders in higher education. Developing nations struggle to modernise their digital infrastructure and give students equitable access to resources as digitalisation becomes the new norm (Sharma, Jain and Mogaji, 2020). As such, the largest obstacle is the massification of higher education, with equal access coming in second. Equal opportunity is still a pipe dream in societies divided along economic lines. Where divisions still exist, people from developing countries are stranded because they are at the bottom of the social and economic classes. Acquiring investments is the third major issue facing emerging nations. It is surprising to learn that developing economies spend a questionable amount on education (Sharma, *et al.*, 2020). Countries are investing very little in tech-based learning systems, despite their increasing popularity. When it comes to financing post-secondary education, priorities differ. Finally, delivering high-quality education is an issue that impacts both emerging nations and the global higher education system. The facilities, resources and content made available to the stakeholders are not substantial. Therefore, there is frequently a compromise in educational quality. In developing nations, a fresh approach to higher education is necessary in light of these issues and current events (Mogaji and Jain, 2020).

South Africa, as part of the Global South and developing world, is required to provide education to the masses in the interest of social justice whilst maintaining the standards of the developed world (Lebowitz, Bozalek, Van Schalkwyk and Winberg, 2015). The realities of globalisation as well as the knowledge and information

economy are forcing structural changes and challenges on HEIs (Cloete, 2017 cited in Diedricks, *et al.*, 2019). As a result of increasing demands from social, political and economic shifts, the SA HE system has been undergoing transformation (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Moshoeu and Geldenhuys, 2015; Pienaar and Bester, 2009 cited in Ndoro and Martins, 2019). For instance, increasing job demands on staff members with large class sizes, student unrest and the enrolment of underprepared students take away from the quality of work-life of university staff (Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Bezuidenhout and Bezuidenhout, 2014; Bezuidenhout and Cilliers, 2010 cited in Ndoro and Martins, 2019). Competing work demands from seeking to provide a good education with meagre resources creates role conflict for staff members, thus inhibiting positive levels of EE (Bezuidenhout and Bezuidenhout, 2014 cited in Ndoro and Martins, 2019).

Higher education faces unique challenges regarding recruiting and retaining talented faculty and staff (Jo, 2008 cited in Yeaman, 2021: 2). For over a century, academic researchers and organisational practitioners in the social sciences have been attempting to determine what it is that makes employees engaged in their work (Macey and Schneider, 2008 cited in Yeaman, 2021: 2). Lencioni (2015: 23) states that employee engagement is a top talent issue facing many organisations today. Marciano (2010: 119-120) explains that employee engagement has demonstrated benefits for organisations such as increased employee attraction, higher retention, greater productivity, and improved customer service. Comparably, employee engagement in the Higher Education sector has benefits such as increased faculty retention and enhanced student attainment (Grant and Notter, 2019: 19). However, according to Eisenhauser (2018: 4), many HEIs are not fully focused on investing in employee engagement. The opinion of Eisenhauser (2018: 4) is shared by Smith, Coffey, Compton, Elkins and Gilles (2018: 23), and Kenon and Palshole (2019: 3).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Over the last two decades, the South African HE landscape has undergone significant changes, which are attributed to the increased propensity for social upliftment, the need for internationally recognised qualifications and the demand for a highly skilled workforce (Locke, Cummings and Fisher, 2011: 102; Shin and Jones, 2022; Ntsanwisi, 2025). In July 1997, the Ministry of Education published a White Paper named *a programme for the transformation of Higher Education*, which outlined a set of policy directives that called on the HE sector to contribute to South Africa achieving political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity (Adejumo, Fakude and Linda, 2014: 1699; de Klerk and Palmer, 2025). Frankema (2012: 1) and Van Schalkwyk, Van Lill, Cloete and Bailey (2022) stated that these sets of directives paved the roadmap of South Africa's HE landscape ever since. Amundsen and Wilson (2012: 98) and Boughey and McKenna (2021: 51) explain that as a follow-up to the White Paper of July 1997, the Ministry of Education gazetted the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) in 2001 in terms of which a need to restructure institutions of higher learning was officially cemented. An extensive programme of merging some of the universities, technikons and colleges in South Africa followed. Consequently, the new HE landscape in South Africa distinguished between Universities of Technology (hereinafter referred to as UoTs) and Traditional and Comprehensive Universities.

According to Altbach (2016: 22) and Coetzee, Neneh, Stemmet, Lamprecht, Motsitsi and Sereeco (2021: 3), the South African HE UoT sector is facing a multitude of academic challenges, namely developing graduates for the social and economic developmental needs of South Africa; achieving equity in the South African HE UoT system; addressing diversity; and sustaining and promoting research. In addition, UoTs experience challenges to secure government funding (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear and Leu, 2014: 15; Boughey and McKenna, 2021: 48), implement innovative technology (Adriansen, Madsen and Jensen, 2015: 99; Masinde and

Roux, 2020), respond to stakeholders' demands (Collings, 2014: 255; Lubinga, Maramura and Masiya, 2023) and adapt to market changes (Middlehurst, 2012: 14; Masinde and Roux, 2020). Vila and Bretxa (2014: 6; Masinde and Roux, 2020: 32) attest that the unique role and function of HE UoT institutions have also necessitated the UoT sector to attract, retain and develop academic staff who can deliver the expected outcomes. According to Adriansen, Madsen and Jensen (2015: 100; Masinde and Roux, 2020: 32), the academic skillset, in particular leadership development, within the UoT sector has evolved rapidly in the last two decades, which emphasises the importance of pro-active planning to develop and retain UoT academic staff. HE UoTs still face many more challenges than a decade ago, thus the necessity for HE UoT academic leaders who are able to manage change, embrace it and use it as an opportunity to further institutional development and growth (Vila and Bretxa, 2014: 4; Van Schalkwyk, Van Lill, Cloete and Bailey, 2022). According to Altbach (2016: 22; Chikukwa, Lourens and Mbona 2024), managing change in the South African UoT sector is only possible if institutions embrace the value of employee engagement and incorporate interventions and strategies to promote communication, participation, joint decision-making and shared responsibilities for institutional growth, effectiveness and efficiency, which will in turn minimise workplace conflict.

The Durban University of Technology (DUT) is a result of a merger between two Technikons: Technikon Natal and ML Sultan Technikon and is therefore classified as a UoT. The growing demand for qualifications from UoTs such as the DUT has led to an increase in student intake. This in turn has resulted in increased work pressure on all staff at the institution (Chikukwa, Lourens and Mbona 2024). Subsequently, this has highlighted the need for planned engagement and conflict management. Furthermore, the DUT's new strategic path named Envision 2030 (to be elaborated on later) contains a strand that holds the strategy together (DUT 2018). This strand is referred to as "people-centeredness and engagement". It is therefore acknowledged that the successful implementation of this new strategy is dependent on the essential engagement of all DUT staff (DUT 2018). Factors such

as a lack of resources, particularly employees with the appropriate knowledge and skills, are likely to impair the institution's efforts to fulfil its strategic objectives. Furthermore, a lack of appropriate human capital and rising workload expectations, among other things, may result in unforeseen workplace conflicts, thereby undermining the DUT's overall strategy (DUT 2018). The institution may also face opposition from employees and unions who are unwilling to adapt to the necessary changes brought about by this new strategy, which may lead to additional conflicts and the subsequent need for effective and efficient conflict management systems and processes at the institution. Alternatively, a more engaged workforce is likely to result in lower levels of conflict and more efficient conflict management within the organisation (Byrne 2014). The current study is therefore motivated by the changing conditions faced by the DUT as highlighted above.

1.3 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Conceptual clarification is presented by offering the definitions of authors on Employee Engagement (hereinafter called EE) and Workplace Conflict (hereinafter called WC). It should be noted that the conceptual clarification below is merely to introduce the concepts at this juncture since more detailed descriptions are highlighted in the literature review.

1.3.1 Employee engagement

Kahn (1990: 3) as cited in Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane and Truss (2008) define EE as “the harnessing of organisational members’ selves to their work roles. In engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances”. The cognitive aspect of employee engagement is related to an employee’s beliefs about the organisation, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect alludes to the employee’s feelings towards each of these three factors and whether they have a positive or negative attitude toward the organisation and its leaders. The physical aspect concerns the

physical energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their roles. According to Kahn (1990) as cited in Kular *et al.* (2008) “engagement means to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organisational role”.

1.3.2 Workplace conflict

Anstey (2006: 6) states that “conflict exists in a relationship when parties believe that their aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously, or perceive a divergence in the values, needs or interests (latent conflict), and purposefully employ their power in an effort to eliminate, defeat, neutralise or change each other to protect or further their interests in the interaction (manifest conflict)”.

Conflicts at work are quite common. They can be the result of a single incident or ongoing tensions over a long time (Zachary, 2003). Managers spend an average of 20% of their time handling conflict (Thomas, 1992 cited in De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer and Nauta, 2001), and evidence shows that conflict and conflict management at work significantly affect individual, group and organisational effectiveness, as well as well-being (de Dreu *et al.*, 2001). The continual management of conflict in organisations is emphasised by research because there is a clear inverse relationship between unresolved workplace conflict and employee engagement (CIPD, 2012).

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

An international study conducted by Cornerstone and Ellucian, the “2016 Employee Engagement and Retention in Higher Education” study surveyed 469 respondents who work at HE institutions, including public, private and for-profit colleges and universities (2016). For the purpose of the survey, “faculty” includes professors, assistants and researchers, while “staff” includes administrators as well as support and grounds personnel. According to the study, faculty and staff have a significant impact (81% of respondents) on student success. However, despite this influence,

nearly half (47%) of institutions neither track nor measure EE. In addition, 39% of the HE institutions surveyed do not offer any form of EE opportunities, such as leadership development, recognition programmes or coaching (Meyer, 2016).

Hauden and Berens (2018: 11) add that one of the first steps in overcoming these challenges is evaluating EE and sentiment to establish a baseline, then setting achievable goals for improvement. The authors state that EE cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach and it is important to really listen to employees and source feedback and suggestions from them to build an effective engagement strategy that will benefit employees and students alike. In the study of 94 HR directors from HE institutions in the UK, most respondents (82%) reported that motivation and engagement had increased in importance over the past five years. However, less than half (47%) had a talent management strategy in place, although 35% reported that they are planning to implement one (Newcombe, 2013).

The above research found that the top three EE tactics being used within HE was clarity of role, setting performance expectations and regular appraisals (Newcombe, 2013). Declan McGrath, managing director of MidlandHR, acknowledged that today's HR directors realise the need to adopt a far more strategic approach to recruitment, hiring, performance, development, and employee retention (Newcombe, 2013). The general vision and goals of the organisation, which drive and measure each of these areas, are crucially connected to one another. McGrath also acknowledged that HEIs are now trying to discover better methods to link these organisational aims with the contributions of the many faculties and departments, which have historically enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. (Newcombe, 2013). In HE, innovation, differentiation and high performance have all become universal requirements, driven by the urgency to become more competitive in the market and fierce competition for funding (Newcombe, 2013).

According to information from Cornerstone OnDemand and Ellucian (2016), programmes that encourage employee engagement, like professional development,

employee mentoring and flexible work arrangements, can boost retention rates and save the company a great deal of money over time. However, 39% of institutions surveyed do not offer any form of employee engagement opportunities. The results of this study clearly demonstrate the necessity for HE personnel to engage in ongoing learning and development. Learning is justifiably strongly centered on the students at academic institutions. However, research shows that institutions that make learning and development investments in their faculty and staff have more engaged employees, which significantly impacts the success of the students (Gallup, 2016). Faculty and staff members contribute to the development of the student experience, and it is the responsibility of the institution to offer their staff members the learning opportunities, opportunities for professional growth, and recognition they merit (Gallup, 2016).

Byrne (2014: 2022) states that EE references are targeted at the practitioner audience, explaining how to get engagement and therefore high performance. Thus far, only a handful are targeted for a mixed HE practice or academic-only audience, suggesting that organisations and the practitioners and consulting firms for whom they work are running full steam ahead with the idea of EE. Hence, researchers need simply to catch up. Indeed, it has been suggested that researchers are attempting to legitimize engagement, an “intuitive construct” (Newman and Harrison, 2008) which requires significant theory, debate and empirical studies for clarifying its uniqueness and validity in causing the effects heavily marketed by human resources and consulting firms (Macey and Schneider, 2008).

HE institutions face unique challenges with sourcing, retaining and engaging employees (Lencioni, 2015: 11). Grant and Notter (2019: 23) explain that nearly half of all HE institutions fail to track employee engagement, and less than 30 percent measure the cost of turnover, which highlights the need for academic institutions to re-assess priorities and implement change. Hauden and Berens (2018: 11) add that one of the first steps in overcoming these challenges is evaluating employee engagement and sentiment to establish a baseline, then setting achievable goals for

improvement. Several authors warn that employee engagement cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach (Carbonara, 2012: 18; Morgan and Goldsmith, 2017: 52; Kaye and Giulioni, 2019: 32). Byrne (2014:91) states that it is important to really listen to employees and source feedback and suggestions from them to build an effective engagement strategy that will benefit employees and students alike. Johnson (2018: 12) and Mone and London (2018: 3) agree with Byrne (2014: 91), warning that a lack of employee engagement often results in workplace conflict, either explicit or latent. Since 1994, the landscape of HE has been changing, with the restructuring of the HE system in South Africa posing numerous challenges to both the management and employees of tertiary institutions. Those responsible for producing the outcomes of HE institutions have a significant role to play. These administrators, lecturers/teachers and support staff comprise the 'human capital' of an educational institution, and it is therefore important to care for these groups of people. The current scenario in HE will definitely impact employee engagement, therefore research on EE is deemed relevant (Coetzee and Rothmann, 2005).

A recent Gallup survey (Meyer, 2016) revealed that more than half of HE faculty members (52%) are not engaged in their work, and an additional 14 percent are actively disengaged. Thus, the question arises: what are the causes of this lack of engagement, and what are the broader implications? A study from Cornerstone OnDemand and Ellucian (2016), which was conducted by the Human Capital Media Research and Advisory Group, suggests that faculty members and staff at HE institutions are disengaged at work due to several factors, including a lack of professional development opportunities and overwhelming workloads. Ultimately, this disengagement leads to high employee turnover rates and potential workplace conflict and the subsequent need to manage such conflict.

Due to the volatile and complex higher education environment in South Africa, universities such as the DUT are required to focus on sustainability and competitiveness as well as the importance of employees and their well-being. HEIs in SA are regarded as critical tools for sustainable economic development and

growth and transformation. Therefore, levels of engagement at HEIs can determine organisational success. Research by Nazir and Islam, 2017; Kovaleski and Arghode, 2021 (cited in Chikukwa, Lourens and Mbona, 2024), found that low levels of employee engagement existed across the South African higher education sector due to declining working conditions and a dearth of employee engagement. Zondo (2020, cited in Chikukwa, Lourens and Mbona, 2024) found that only 9% of the South African workforce are actively engaged whilst 45% are actively disengaged.

Furthermore, a study by Bhana and Suknunan, 2021 found that the DUT is affected by various external challenges such as reduced funding, autonomy issues, transformation, massification, increased debt and internal challenges such as heavy workloads, research output targets, student concerns and protests, administrative issues, amongst other problems. Chikukwa, Lourens and Mbona, 2024 suggest that these challenges have the potential to lower employee engagement and even result in employee disengagement. This in turn will likely result in low morale and deviant behaviour and is usually linked with negative organisational outcomes such as increased stress, anxiety, job dissatisfaction, absenteeism, staff turnover and declining quality of work which may negatively influence the achievement of organisational goals. The study by Bhana and Suknunan, 2021 therefore found clear evidence of employee disengagement at the DUT which led to occupational stress, employee burnout, moral disengagement and employee turnover at the institution. In addition, Byrne (2014) also stated that a lack of employee engagement often resulted in workplace conflict. It is therefore critical to investigate the influence of employee engagement on managing workplace conflict at the DUT.

1.5 AIM OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to establish the impact of employee engagement strategies on managing workplace conflict at a selected UoT, namely the Durban University of Technology. The study explores the various forms of employee

engagement strategies and the development of policies, procedures and workplace interventions to manage employer-employee conflict.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The research objectives for the study are:

- To explore employee engagement strategies and interventions that are used at the DUT;
- To determine the antecedents of employee engagement at the DUT; and
- To investigate whether employee engagement has an influence on managing workplace conflict at the DUT.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for the study are as follows:

- What are the various employee engagement strategies and interventions used at the DUT?
- What are the antecedents of employee engagement for the DUT?
- What is the relationship between employee engagement and workplace conflict at the DUT?

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study is to make an original contribution to the body of knowledge regarding the impact of Employee Engagement in reducing Conflict at UoTs in South Africa. The envisaged significance of the study is two-fold in that it will contribute (i) academically (i.e. theoretically and methodologically) to the fields of Human Resources Management and Employee Relations Management, and (ii) to the adaptability of HE UoTs in the South African context. Academically, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by adding new insights into the fields of Human Resources Management and Employee Relations, especially in the South

African higher education context. From a theoretical perspective, the research aims to extend existing knowledge and frameworks or propose contextually relevant interpretations that reflect the dynamics within South African higher HEIs. Methodologically, the study may offer innovative approaches or adaptations suited to the unique environment of UoTs, thereby providing a foundation for future empirical enquiry in similar contexts. Practically, the study also offers useful recommendations that can assist universities of technology improve how they manage staff and adapt to change. The present study integrates concepts, practices and existing employee engagement models and theories which have formed the foundation for employee engagement strategies as applied in both the private and public sectors. In addition, it investigates the possible influence of employee engagement on the management of workplace conflict within South Africa and more specifically within the SA higher education sector. This is significant as there is a dearth of research relating to this area not only within SA in general but more specifically within the higher education context (Holtzhausen, 2020) and therefore justifies the need for such research.

1.9 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study is on a selected University of Technology, namely the Durban University of Technology (DUT), based in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, with a total staff complement of 1876 employees (DUT Staff Directory, 2022). Moreover, the study is delimited and does not include traditional and comprehensive Universities in KwaZulu-Natal due to situational factors that differ in their uniqueness and diverse complexities.

1.10 LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE STUDY – A BRIEF OVERVIEW

1.10.1 An overview of international studies on employee engagement in the higher education context

According to various authors such as Byrne (2022), Satata (2021), Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) and Harris (2018), research in Employee Engagement (EE) has experienced unprecedented growth over the last two decades. Despite this reported growth spurt in both practice and scholarship, as indicated by the abovementioned researchers, there is still a need to explore EE in the HE context (Byrne and MacDonagh, 2017; Barkhuizen *et al.*, 2014; Rothmann and Jordaan, 2006). Ammari (2021) states that EE in the HE sector is viewed from a reactive perspective, whilst the private sector follows a proactive approach.

EE research is embedded in both academic and practitioner streams. Numerous studies have been conducted in the last 30 years since William Kahn's initial study (1990). Practitioner research (for example Buckingham and Coffman, 1999; Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002; Luthans and Peterson, 2002; Hewitt Associates, 2004) has focused on the benefits of having an engaged workforce for organisations whilst avoiding conceptualising engagement. This is motivated by the fact that employers acknowledge the importance of engaged employees and the subsequent need to understand what makes them feel engaged (Motyka, 2018 cited in Ammari, 2021). Alternatively, academic research has attempted to conceptualise engagement and develop it into a sound theoretical construct (May, Gilson and Harter, 2004; Saks, 2006; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker, 2002). With regard to HE research, the focus has been on attempts to understand how academic employees are engaged enough to deliver high-quality services in an ever-changing organisational, societal and political environment (Sokol, Gozdek, Figurska and Blaskova, 2015; Kuipers, Higgs, Kickert, Tummers, Grandia and Van der Voet, 2014; Perry and Vandenabeele, 2015; Truss, Shantz, Soane, Alfes and Delbridge, 2013).

Numerous studies have indicated that engagement has a positive influence at both the individual and organisational level (Bailey, Madden, Alfes and Fletcher, 2017; Farndale, Beijer, Van Veldhoven, Kelliher and Hope-Hailey, 2014; Shantz, Alfes, Truss and Soane, 2013). EE studies have also been conducted in both the private and public sectors showing the influence of EE as a predictor of organisational

commitment (Lee and OK, 2016 cited in Ammari, 2021), and the significant positive effect that EE has on productivity (Hanaysha, 2016 cited in Ammari, 2021). Other studies have identified the link between EE and employee retention (Fernandes and Balu, 2018; Stumpf, Tymon and Van Dam, 2013). It is therefore critical to understand the way engagement is perceived in both sectors, but more importantly in the context of the public and/or higher education sectors.

Despite the significance of EE and its critical impact on Human Resource Management (HRM), there are still many problems related to its conceptualisation and its similarity to other well-established constructs such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment (OC) and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Ammari, 2021). Authors such as du Plessis and Martins (2017), Saks (2006a) and Schaufeli (2017b) state that EE is a popular but disputed and fragmented concept (cited in Holtzhausen, 2020). The question of what makes employees feel more engaged has not yet been fully answered. Ammari (2021) states that there are more than 50 definitions of EE, thus making it difficult to separate it from other constructs. This is confirmed in studies by Bailey, (2016; 2022); Fletcher, Bailey, Alfes and Madden (2020); Gifford and Young (2021); and Macleod and Clark (2009). This has resulted in some confusion surrounding the construct of engagement. Nevertheless, the current study accepts that EE is an independent construct, different from other well-established concepts (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011; Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006; Saks, 2008) because it involves a “more holistic investment of the self into one’s role” (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011). Harter (2022) adds that engaged employees add value to the organisation, and that only one-third of all employees are fully engaged. Many organisations still struggle to grasp the significance and nature of employee engagement, a term that goes beyond a mere fleeting motivated state, despite a plethora of conferences and training sessions devoted to this topic. Furthermore, according to Robertson (2019 cited in Theron, 2022), they have no idea how to build and maintain it.

In contrast to its previous reputation as a stable, primarily publicly funded sector, HEIs are currently dealing with several changes in their policy environment, including increased international competition, reduced funding from government, new regulations and sector restructuring (Wasilowski, 2018). Given these difficulties, they may find it easier to recruit, develop and retain their human resources through employee engagement, which offers a more strategic perspective on people management (Wasilowski, 2018). A survey by Gallup (2016) indicated that universities are the least engaged workplaces. In South Africa, HEIs are having to respond to these environmental challenges to remain relevant and competitive. This has led to increased enrolments and reduced staffing and job resources, coupled with ongoing student unrest (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver, 2014). A critical issue for study is the impact of these changes on levels of engagement amongst university staff (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver, 2014).

Traditionally, HE institutions both locally and internationally have been accepted as places of collegiality. This implies that academic staff are expected to participate in the collegial governance of the institution and therefore resides under a faculty member's service obligations (Dawson, Morales, Mckiernan, Schimanski, Niles and Alperin, 2022: 2). According to Cipriano and Buller (2012: 46), collegiality is manifest in the relationships that form within departments, and in the way that team members cooperate to accomplish shared goals and take on equitable responsibilities for the benefit of the entire department. Collegiality includes general professionalism in behaviour and presentation; a readiness to collaborate with faculty, staff and students on group projects; a consistently demonstrated level of responsibility, which includes prompt email, phone and written correspondence responses; the timely submission of necessary administrative information, data or reports; regular and prompt attendance at department or university meetings; and knowledge of and adherence to all applicable laws and regulations (Cameron University of History and Government, 2010 cited in Dawson, *et al.*, 2022: 9). Consequent to this collegiality in HE institutions, the concept of EE within such institutions was not even considered, let alone being made a priority by those in authority. However, in recent years, due

to the influx of younger academics as well as changes in the political, economic, social, technological and legal environments, which in turn has resulted in changes in organisational culture, the expectations of employees in such institutions have changed dramatically. Organisations are now expected to attract, retain and engage new types of employees entering the workplace (Jha, Sareen and Potnuru, 2019: 8). However, achieving engagement has always been a challenge for HR practitioners, and the emergence of this new type of employee (the 'millennial') has made it even more difficult. Most contemporary organisations are facing challenges with achieving engagement amongst millennial workers as they change jobs frequently and are not as loyal as previous generations of workers. According to a PwC report published in 2011, the biggest difficulty facing organisations today is attracting, retaining and engaging millennials (Jha, Sareen and Potnuru, 2019: 9). Disengaged employees tend to have a negative attitude towards their jobs; a reluctance to work as part of a team; a tendency for workplace violence and bullying; and increased conflict with subordinates, peers and superiors, amongst other factors (Allam, 2017: 50). It is therefore critical that addressing EE in the workplace may assist in reducing organisational conflict, as well as addressing many other negative outcomes within the workplace.

1.10.2 Overview of international research on workplace conflict in the higher education sector

Workplace conflict (WC) is often fuelled by an imbalance between organisational expectations and individual perceptions relating to employee needs and well-being (Ebeguki, Odunayo, Hezekiah, Maxwell and Opeyemi, 2019). The latter is evident in a study conducted by Chilala (2021), which focuses on WC and employee satisfaction and performance. Research conducted in the African context reflects an abundance of examples on how the working environment can be a major contributor to WC (Chilala, 2021; Ebeguki, Omotayo and Paul, 2016; Ebeguki, *et al.*, 2019). For example, a study by Ebeguki *et al.* (2019) in Nigeria identified limited research regarding the quality of communication in handling internal and external conflicts at

Nigerian universities. It referenced international studies in America, Europe and some parts of Asia that confirmed the role of effective communication as part of strategic management in resolving conflicts between key stakeholders in the organisation (Ebeguki, *et al.*, 2019). However, the authors indicate little evidence to suggest that similar studies have been conducted in Africa, particularly in the Nigerian context. Enormous accomplishments have been documented in these regions of the world (America, Europe and Asia) on the effectiveness of this essential component of conflict resolution. Subsequently, the study found that strategic communication can lead to conflict resolution between key stakeholders in the organisation and therefore act as a strong panacea for change (Ebeguki, *et al.*, 2019: 71).

Similarly, in other African countries, the importance of HE and its constant need to adapt to the changing environment is acknowledged, but the support required from top management to ensure that working conditions are aligned to the change management interventions required (either regionally or nationally) is seriously lacking (Chilala, 2021: 4). In other words, change in HE on the African continent is aggressively driven and promoted, but the expected changes do not always translate into actual support for staff in the workplace. This has significant implications for conflict in the workplace (Ebeguki, *et al.*, 2019; Chilala, 2021). Driving institutional change from the top without support for staff on the ground is a recipe for disaster and is likely to result in continuous conflict both at the individual and collective levels (Ebeguki *et al.*, 2019). Chilala's (2021) study in Ghana found that communication, rewards, resources and management practices are critical workplace conflict factors. The study suggested that if an organisation wants to increase employee satisfaction and performance, it must seriously consider all four of these factors. In addition, the study highlighted the strong correlation between employee satisfaction and workplace conflict (Chilala, 2021: 22). It also found that resources, rewards and management practices can have a positive impact on employee satisfaction and performance within universities (Chilala, 2021: 22). Top management cannot focus on instituting changes within HE whilst failing to provide the necessary resources to ensure that these changes are implemented according to plan (Ebeguki *et al.*, 2019).

This is also the case with curriculum changes in higher education locally and internationally. According to the New Partnerships for Africa's Development (NEPAD) report from 2003, addressing development concerns in Africa required an interdisciplinary approach, which meant that all HEI academics had to get involved in the process of changing their curricula (Lotz-Sisitka and Lupele, 2015: 49). The motivation for these changes stems from changing national priorities influenced by structural and cultural demands, such as national policies, learner needs, etcetera (Lotz-Sisitka and Lupele, 2015: 52). Discussions about national and institutional curriculums regarding the best ways to prepare graduates for a knowledge economy because of the worldwide move to "knowledge-based economies" have already taken place in the last decade. Re-thinking curriculum approaches to solve significant articulation gaps between secondary and higher education is a response to the difficulties of access and retention. These changes are a reaction to a plethora of critical problems that confront higher education worldwide and in Africa, namely massification, uneven educational delivery, and the escalating demands of middle-class families. Other issues include the employability agenda, growing demand for specialised knowledge, and declining public funding (Shay, 2015). This in turn adds to the already increased pressure on academics to deliver better quality teaching and research outputs, an increased emphasis on higher student completion rates, and publications in high-impact journals (O'Neil and Gopal, 2021: 471). These changes in the higher education environment, namely work intensification, increased workloads, poor work-life balance, and declining well-being, directly affect academic staff (Bezuidenhout and Cilliers, 2010; Olivier, De Jager, Grootboom and Tokota, 2005, cited in O'Neill and Gopal, 2021). Research conducted by Yidana (2022) and Shay (2015) also extends workplace conflict to curricula challenges on the African continent and aligns these teaching and learning factors to employees experiencing work-related stress and uncertainties.

Workplace conflict is both inevitable and dynamic in nature. Yidana (2022) states that conflict as a complex reality is a regular occurrence in higher education.

Furthermore, it is accepted that conflicts in higher education are both common and unavoidable (Adu, 2011; Anderson, 2002; Gmelch and Carroll, 1991 cited in Yidana, 2022). Educational institutions, by their very nature, also promote conflict (Miklas and Kleiner, 2003 cited in Yidana, 2022). Notwithstanding the apparent prevalence of conflict in higher education, higher education institutions have not been extensively examined in empirical studies on the topic (Yidana, 2022). Anderson (2002 cited in Yidana, 2022) asserts that although academic departments and institutions are not exempt from conflict, most research on organisational conflict has overlooked academic environments. It is therefore imperative that workplace conflict in the higher education context is researched, hence the motivation for the current study.

1.10.3 Studies relating to employee engagement and workplace conflict in the South African higher education sector

According to a recent study by Holtzhausen (2020:157), the literature indicates that employee engagement, as well as several other factors such as leadership, organisational culture, employee voice and organisational trust, are closely related to conflict and conflict management within organisations. Holtzhausen (2020: 157) also indicates that very little research has been conducted on the topic, thereby justifying the current study which attempted to understand the various relationships between the antecedents and the mediating and moderating variables of conflict. The author specifically identifies EE as a mediating variable of conflict and highlights the fact that very few studies have considered the value of EE in conflict management. In addition, Emmott (2015) recognises that there is a significant relationship between EE, conflict management, and a supportive organisational culture. In fact, EE is regarded as a measure of employment relations effectiveness and reflects a trusting relationship amongst all role-players (Emmott, 2015; CIPD, 2012; Curry, Gormley, Roche and Teague, 2017 cited in Holtzhausen, 2020). Soieb, Othman and D'Silva (2013) also found that EE cannot eliminate conflict altogether but is able to reduce the levels of conflict in the organisation. A study by Teague, Roche, Gormley and Currie (2015) identified EE as one of four approaches to

managing workplace conflict and that there is an overlap between two approaches, namely focusing on engagement and strengthening line management. Another study (CIPD, 2012) also indicated that an inverse relationship exists between unresolved workplace conflict and EE. A further study by Jungst and Janssens (2020) found a positive relationship between EE and task conflict, as well as extra-role performance amongst employees in two countries, namely the People's Republic of China and the Netherlands. In other words, EE mediates the role between task conflict and extra-role performance. Holtzhausen (2020: 164) confirms that despite the above research and the significance thereof, hardly any further research could be found on the relationship between EE and conflict. An extensive review of the literature revealed very little material focusing on EE and conflict in organisations, thus highlighting a significant gap in the research both locally and internationally.

Additionally, research focusing on the relationship between EE and workplace conflict within the higher education context is almost non-existent. A search on Google Scholar yielded two relevant studies dealing with employee engagement, workplace conflict and higher education, although the second study focused on employee well-being as opposed to EE. These included studies by Akanji, Mordi, Ajonbadi and Mojeed-Sanni (2018) and Van Niekerk, De Klerk and Pires-Putter (2017). This confirms Holtzhausen's (2020) conclusion that research on the relationship between EE and workplace conflict is severely lacking, thus presenting an opportunity for further research, especially from an employee relations perspective. It therefore appears that HE is lagging the private sector with its focus still on collegiality and the development of policy and procedure regarding workplace relations. In other words, HEIs have not yet reached the point of either focusing on engagement or on the relationship between EE and conflict. These results highlight the need for further research within the HE context.

1.11 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

This section addresses how the research is conducted and how data will be collected and analysed. It focuses on the following: research design, data collection, and questionnaire design and data analysis.

1.11.1 Secondary data collection

Smith (2012: 19) explains that secondary data refers to the specific information collected by individuals or organisations other than the primary researcher. Secondary data for this study was sourced from journal articles, related textbooks, the internet, media articles, government publications, periodicals and other dissertations and theses.

1.11.2 Primary data

According to Gast and Ledford (2018: 119), primary data is obtained from observing the study in an investigative manner and usually entails collecting the data personally. For this study, a closed-ended structured quantitative questionnaire (Annexure B) as a data-gathering instrument will be utilised.

1.11.3 Research design

Leavy (2019: 201) describes the concept of the research design as a plan specifying how the researcher will conduct the actual study. Furthermore, Sahu (2016: 109) adds that research design is especially important since it allows the researcher to plan the collection and analysis of data. Slaughter and Taylor (2015: 154) also clarifies that the research design indicates the most appropriate research methods that will allow the researcher to make an informed decision. For this study, a quantitative research paradigm will be adopted. Quantitative research refers to the

systematic empirical investigation of a problem by the researcher whilst using many statistical analyses (Duke and Mallette, 2011: 86).

1.11.4 Target population

A population is the full set of elements from which a sample is selected (Flick, 2015: 122). The target population for this study comprised all academic and administrative staff members of the DUT based in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The identified target population of N=1876 was obtained from the internal staff directory via the Human Resources Department at DUT (DUT Staff Directory, 2022).

1.11.5 Sampling techniques

Durdella (2018: 92) defines sampling as a portion or a smaller number of units of a population. Chapman, Schutz and DeCuir-Gunby (2018: 176) add that a sample is identified as the components that are representative and having characteristics of that total population. According to Dane (2017: 112-113), there are two types of sampling methods, namely probability and non-probability sampling techniques. In this study, the simple random technique as a probability sampling will be used for the quantitative research design. The sampling frame for the quantitative research design was accessed via an alphabetical list of staff obtained from the Human Resource Department, as highlighted in the internal telephone directory.

1.11.6 Selection of the sample

The design of a sample describes the method used to select the sample from the population (Persaud, Devonish and Persaud, 2019: 162). For this study's purpose, Sekaran and Bougie's (2014: 268) computed table for determining the optimum sample size from a given population is used to select the sample. For this study, a target population of N=1876 and a sample size of n=320 is recommended by Sekaran and Bougie (2014).

1.11.7 Data collection method

A structured questionnaire will be used to collect data, as shown in Annexure B. The researcher will send out the questionnaire electronically via MS Forms with a covering letter (Annexure A) to all participants. According to Allen (2016: 54), this method allows a high response rate compared to other research methods. The selected sample respondents will be asked to return the completed questionnaires within one month.

1.11.8 Questionnaire design and protocols

A questionnaire is a formalised set of questions for obtaining information from respondents (Jolivet, 2015: 54). In addition, a questionnaire allows the researcher to collect quantitative data in a standardised manner, which facilitates consistency (Nardi, 2018: 119).

In the quantitative research design, a closed-ended structured quantitative questionnaire will be used to collect data from the selected sample respondents. The questionnaire will comprise the following: a covering letter assuring respondents of their anonymity and a consent form. The questionnaire will be developed taking into consideration the guidelines provided by Vagle (2018: 118), which includes closed-ended questions, conciseness, unambiguity, using a justified sequence and ensuring that the questions are appreciable to all respondents.

1.11.9 Pilot Test

The purpose of a pilot study is to refine the questions on the questionnaire to ensure that there is no ambiguity or bias so that the measuring instrument is fine-tuned for data collection (Jordan, Werner and Venter, 2015: 4). For this study, 30 homogeneous respondents who will not form part of the sample respondents will

participate in this study and will be randomly selected to test the questionnaire so that the necessary revisions can be made before the questionnaire is administered to the selected main sample grouping. Moreover, the responses of the 30 pilot respondents will be captured to form a dataset. This will then be subjected to the Cronbach Coefficient Alpha Test to determine the questionnaire's reliability.

1.11.10 Reliability and validity

Kumah, Ankomah and Antwi (2016: 26) state that reliability refers to the consistency or dependability of a measuring instrument. A measuring instrument that is reliable will produce the same results if a variable is repeatedly measured under almost identical circumstances (Kumah, Ankomah and Antwi, 2016: 26). In quantitative research, reliability is defined as "the extent to which an experiment, test or measurement yields the same result or consistent measurement on repeated trials" (Silverman, 2006: 282). Gass (2010) equates reliability with the consistency in scores across the administration of one's measuring instrument, for example a questionnaire. Mutsuddi (2016: 71) clarifies that validity measures the degree to which a study succeeds in measuring the intended values, and the extent to which differences found reflect the true measures and/or differences amongst the respondents. A test or instrument is valid if it measures what it intends to measure (Souza, Alexandre and Guirardello, 2017: 652).

1.11.11 Analysis of data

The responses to the closed-ended structured quantitative questionnaire will be captured to form a dataset. Thereafter, the responses will be analysed using the latest version of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 for Windows. SPSS will also facilitate appropriate statistical tests for the empirical analysis. The initial data will be analysed into descriptive statistics for the demographic variables, which will be used to analyse the composition and characteristics of the sample. This will be organised and summarised data presented

in figures. According to Jordan, Werner and Venter (2015: 5), hypotheses are used to statistically test for significance between two variables, namely the dependent variable and independent variable.

1.11.12 Ethical considerations and confidentiality

Social research, according to Prabhu (2016: 18), is a dynamic process that often involves an intrusion into people's lives, and therefore largely depends on the establishment of a successful relationship between the researcher and respondents. Srinivasan and Chandwani (2014: 1512) provide a list of key ethical considerations that normally require adherence when undertaking research, namely:

- The voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw partially or completely from the process;
- Consent and the possible deception of participants;
- Maintenance of the confidentiality of data provided by individuals or identifiable participants and their anonymity;
- Privacy of possible and actual participants;
- Reactions of participants in the way in which researchers seek to collect data;
- Effects on participants of the way in which researchers use, analyse and report their data; and
- Behaviour and objectivity of the researcher.

1.12 STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 provides a background and an overview of the study. It addresses the problem statement, key objectives, significance of the study, a brief review of the related literature and the methodological approach to the study.

Chapter 2 introduces the concepts of employee engagement and workplace conflict by referring to extant literature on these two discourses and summarising previous

research on employee engagement and workplace conflict. It also provides a theoretical background to the study.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology and design. It includes a detailed discussion on the sample selection, the collection of primary and secondary data, the pilot test and the measuring instrument's development.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the data using SPSS version 29 for Windows and a detailed discussion of the findings. The appropriate statistical analysis also tests the various hypotheses to explore the tenability of the exploratory model formulated.

Chapter 5 concludes with the salient findings of the study and makes tentative recommendations arising from the empirical analysis. The chapter concludes with directions for future research.

1.13 CONCLUSION

This chapter proffered a scientific orientation to the study by providing a background to the research problem pertaining to a lack of employee engagement amongst HE staff and the failure of HEIs to track and measure EE. This chapter also provided a brief review of the theoretical framework in which the study is contextualised. Furthermore, this chapter outlined the research objectives, questions, methodology and design, and the expected theoretical and practical value of the study. In the next chapter a detailed background to the study is provided in terms of the discourses of employee engagement and workplace conflict. This is done by reflecting on the literature around EE. Chapter 2 also discusses the theoretical framework used in this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

For decades, scholars have argued that changes in the world of work necessitate more effort and new practices from today's organisations to thrive, owing to an increasingly competitive and global environment (Kahn 1992; Kwon, Farndale and Park 2016; Schaufeli 2013 cited in Holtzhausen, 2020). Much has been published over the years in scholarly research articles and management publications about the role of engagement in the pursuit of success (Saks 2006a; Schaufeli 2013, 2018). Meta-analysis research, for example, indicates a strong link between job satisfaction and Employee Engagement (EE) levels, and successful business outcomes (Green, Finkel, Fitzsimons and Gino 2017; Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002). According to Schaufeli's European research (2018), there is a relatively favourable relationship between EE and job satisfaction on a countrywide level in Europe. Importantly, Schaufeli (2018) shows that at the national level, engagement is strongly and positively related to economic activity and productivity. Employee engagement is valued in South Africa as well (Du Plessis and Martins 2017 cited in Holtzhausen, 2020). For example, according to a Deloitte report on South African human capital trends (2017 cited in Holtzhausen, 2020), 66% of respondents monitor EE (defined in this survey as how employees feel about their workplaces, showing their level of commitment to the enterprise) at least once a year.

Employee Engagement is a concern not only for private sector organisations, but also public sector organisations, including HEIs. Historically, higher education scholars have focused on faculty and student participation (for examples see Devlin, Brockett and Nichols 2009; Bozeman and Gaughan 2011 cited in Yeaman, 2021; Mudrak, Zebrodska, Kveton, Jelinek, Blatny, Solcova and Machovcova, 2018). This is expected given that a university's primary aim is to educate students and prepare them for careers and citizenship. Professional (non-academic) staff are, on the other

hand, a significant and increasing community that higher education administrators and leaders cannot afford to overlook. This study therefore intended to discover the influence of EE on managing workplace conflict among higher education (academic and non-academic) staff at the Durban University of Technology (DUT).

There is a substantial amount of literature available on EE. This can be separated into both academic and practitioner streams led by Kahn (1990) and Gallup (1999) respectively. The academic stream has been playing catch-up over the last 30 years as practitioner research has been leading the way. The goal of engagement research has been to produce a uniform definition of what it means to be engaged and to understand the factors that influence EE. This literature review includes numerous foundational publications that discuss the history of, and concepts linked to, the study of EE, for the sake of consistency across this study. It looked at research on EE in higher education. It also examined the nature and challenges of workplace conflict within the higher education context. The review also considered the roles of the various parties within the employment relationship including the private and public sector. The literature review looked at the theoretical principles used in this study and explained why employees respond to different settings with greater or decreased engagement to forecast how EE can influence workplace conflict.

2.1.1 Overview of the higher education (HE) sector in South Africa with specific reference to Universities of Technology (UOTs)

In the last two decades, the South African HE landscape has undergone significant changes, which are attributed to the increased propensity for social upliftment, the need for internationally recognised qualifications, and the demand for a highly skilled workforce (Locke, Cummings and Fisher 2011: 102). In July 1997, the Ministry of Education published a White Paper, named *a programme for the transformation of Higher Education*, which outlined a set of policy directives that called on the HE sector to contribute to South Africa achieving political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity

(Adejumo, Fakude and Linda 2014: 1699). Frankema (2012: 1) states that this set of directives has paved the roadmaps for South Africa's HE landscape ever since their inception. Amundsen and Wilson (2012: 98) explain that as a follow up to the White Paper of July 1997, the Ministry of Education gazetted *the National Plan for Higher Education* (NPHE) in 2001, in terms of which a need to restructure institutions of higher learning was officially cemented. An extensive programme of merging some of the universities, technikons, and colleges in South Africa followed. Consequently, the new HE landscape in South Africa distinguished between Universities of Technology (herein after referred to as UoTs) and Traditional or Comprehensive Universities. The DUT (a merger between Technikon Natal and ML Sultan Technikon) falls into the category of a UoT. An example of a traditional university would be the University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN) while an example of a comprehensive university would be the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), which is a product of a merger between Port Elizabeth (PE) Technikon, the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE), and Vista University (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, n.d.).

According to Altbach (2016: 22), the South African HE UoT sector was facing, and continues to face, a multitude of academic challenges, namely, developing graduates for the social and economic developmental needs of South Africa, achieving equity in the South African HE UoT system, addressing diversity, and sustaining and promoting research. In addition, UoTs have experienced challenges with securing government funding (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear and Leu 2014: 15), implementing modern technology (Adriansen, Madsen and Jensen 2015: 99), responding to stakeholders demands (Collings 2014: 255) and adapting to market changes (Middlehurst 2012: 14). Vila and Bretxa (2014: 6) attest that the unique role and function of HE UoT institutions have also necessitated the UoT sector to attract, retain and develop academic staff, who can deliver the expected outcomes. According to Adriansen, Madsen and Jensen (2015: 100), the academic skills set, in particular, leadership development within the UoT sector, has evolved rapidly in the last two decades, which emphasises the importance of pro-active planning to

develop and retain UoT academic staff. HE UoTs still face many more challenges than a decade ago, hence the need for HE UoT academic leaders who can manage change, embracing it, and using it as an opportunity for further institutional development and growth (Vila and Bretxa 2014: 4). According to Altbach (2016: 22), managing change in the South African UoT sector is only possible if institutions embrace the value of EE and incorporate interventions and strategies to promote communication, participation, joint decision-making, and shared responsibilities for institutional growth, effectiveness, and efficiency, which in turn will minimise workplace conflict. In addition to this, the demographic profile in HE is changing rapidly as older academic and administrative staff retire and are replaced by younger Gen Y (millennials) staff below the age of 35 (Robyn and du Preez 2013: 2). This creates several new challenges for HEIs, including understanding the expectations of these employees, and more importantly, how to promote EE to attract, retain and develop such employees.

Table 2.1: List of Universities of Technology (UoTs) in South Africa

Name of Institution	Province	Permanent Staff Complement	Student Enrolments 2020	Staff/Student Ratio
Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)	Western Cape	2827	32 383	1:12
Central University of Technology (CUT)	Free State	967	21 103	1:22
Durban University of Technology (DUT)	Kwa-Zulu Natal	1624	33 933	1:21
Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT)	Kwa-Zulu Natal	613	14 652	1:24
Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)	Gauteng Province	3432	62 482	1:18
Vaal University of Technology (VUT)	Gauteng province	1072	20 293	1:19
Total	National	10 535	184 846	1:18

Source: Self-Generated.

According to the latest figures shown in a Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) report for South Africa, there are 26 public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa (2022: 3). The public higher education sector consists of 26 universities, differentiated into 11 general/traditional academic universities; nine comprehensive universities and six universities of technology (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2022: 10). As reflected in Table 2.1, six of these HEIs (or 23%) are classified as UoTs. More specifically, in the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN), where this study was conducted, there are four public HEIs and two (50%) of these are UoTs, namely DUT and MUT. UoTs therefore constitute a significant percentage of the higher education sector and more specifically within the province of KZN. Universities of Technology (UoTs) in South Africa mostly offer diploma and certificate programmes, but they may also offer three-year degree programmes. The requirements for admission differ based on the course a learner may want to pursue. In addition to the essential tasks of a university, a UoT emphasises innovative problem-solving and career-oriented courses. The courses are designed to be career-oriented and practical, with an emphasis on experiential learning (Farham 2021: 1)

The DHET report (2022: 3) also states that more than one million students (1 094 808 or 83,3%) enrolled at public HEIs in 2020. The target in the South African government's National Development Plan (NDP) is 1.6 million enrolments in both public and private HEIs by 2030 (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2022: 3). Over the period 2009-2020, overall student enrolment in public HEIs increased by 30,7% (257 032) (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2022: 11). A total of 209 522 first-time entering students were enrolled in public HEIs in 2020, which was 19.1% of the total enrolment. The number of first-time entering students increased by 11.6% or 21 800 between 2019 and 2020 (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2022: 11).

Graduation rates amongst public HEIs in 2020 (237 882) also increased by 7,2% (15 940) as compared to those in 2019 (221 942). Although many students obtained

undergraduate degrees (103 196 or 43,4%), which are offered by traditional and comprehensive universities, a considerable number of students obtained undergraduate certificates and diplomas (63 900 or 26.9%) offered by UoTs in South Africa. The Department of Higher Education and Training also plans to produce 4 300 PhD graduates by 2024, thus increasing the pressures on HEIs to not only enrol more students at undergraduate level, but at postgraduate level as well. This will significantly impact staffing requirements for such institutions regarding new recruits and existing staff expected to meet the challenges faced by the higher education sector (2022:3).

The demand for higher education has also increased due to the South African government's National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). The Department of Higher Education report (2022: 5) indicates that R37.1 billion was allocated for student funding during the 2020 academic year, which reflected a R9.3 billion (33,5%) increase from the allocation in 2019 (R27.8 billion). This has therefore, resulted in an increase in the demand for higher education in South Africa, placing further pressures on HEIs especially with regards to staffing and resources.

In 2020, there were 64 551 permanent employees working for public HEIs, with administrative personnel making up more than half of those employees (50.6%, or 32 644), followed by instruction and research staff (31.5%, or 20 309), and services staff (18.0% or 11 598) (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2022: 26). This reflects an average staff to student ratio of 1:17 in 2020. For UoTs the average staff to student ratio is 1:18, however three UoTs have very high staff/student ratios, namely, DUT, MUT, and CUT (above 20). CPUT has the lowest ratio (1:12) which is closer to the average ratios found in the traditional universities (1:9) (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2022: 98-106).

From the above figures, there is sufficient evidence of a growing need for UoTs due to the increasing demand for higher education in South Africa. In addition, the education offered by UoTs (higher certificates and diplomas), allows more

accessibility for matriculants, as compared to the offerings provided by traditional university structures. Furthermore, this has resulted in work pressure on academic and administrative staff at UoTs increasing substantially. One might add that the increased pressure is on the entire staff complement at UoTs in South Africa, necessitating the need for planned engagement and conflict management.

2.1.2 The relationship between employee engagement and workplace conflict

According to Holtzhausen (2020: 18), there is a dearth of studies on the psychosocial process of EE's mediating role on conflict management (conflict types and interpersonal conflict handling styles).

Employee Engagement is defined as personal engagement and personal disengagement, based on an employee's psychological presence, in the pioneering work of Kahn (1990). According to Kahn (1990), personal engagement is the behaviour that employees exhibit to show how much they integrate or do not integrate their personal selves into their work roles. Employees that are personally engaged at their highest levels perform at their best physically, mentally, and emotionally (Kahn 1990). The opposite is also true. Employees who are disengaged from their work roles physically, mentally, or emotionally during the performance of those roles are said to have uncoupled themselves from those roles (Kahn 1990). Since then, numerous additional definitions of EE have appeared (Macey and Schneider 2008). For example, Saks (2006a) notes that EE is not an attitude but rather describes how absorbed and focused individuals are in their roles as members of the organisation, or in their professions. Additionally, one of the most widely accepted definitions of job engagement relates to a favourable working mental state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá and Bakker 2002).

Emmott (2015) found a strong correlation between conflict management, a supportive conflict culture, and EE. Research, however, indicates that while EE helps to reduce conflict, it does not entirely eradicate it (Soieb, Othman and D'Silva 2013 cited in Holtzhausen, 2020). A negative correlation between unresolved workplace conflict and EE was also discovered (Soieb, Othman and D'Silva 2013). In fact, conflict is seen as a job demand which negatively affects engagement according to Bakker and Demerouti (2018). According to Costa, Passos, Bakker, Romana and Ferro (2017), engagement depends on good interpersonal interactions and processes, including conflict management. However, just a few studies have examined the connection between conflict management and EE, and Jungst and Blumberg (2016) corroborate that the effects of conflict on engagement are mostly unknown. At the time of writing, no studies on whether EE mediates conflict management could be located (conflict styles and interpersonal conflict handling styles).

2.2 EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

2.2.1 Overview of the conceptual development of employee engagement

Employee Engagement is regarded as a new construct, but it has garnered substantial interest within the last 20 years (Harris 2018: 35). Over the past two decades, the concept of EE has become increasingly popular among practitioners, organisational executives, and organisational sciences scholars (Byrne 2022: 28). Satata (2021: 41) maintains that, in the domains of organisational development, management, and industrial psychology, EE is a hot topic. Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019: 63) state that EE is a critical issue within management theory and practice, and in recent years positive psychologists, human resource academics, and management practitioners have focused their research on EE. Work engagement, as a positive element of psychology, is becoming more prominent in occupational health psychology due to the increasing interest in positive psychology. Many consulting firms are conducting ongoing research on EE by polling employers

and employees in regard to their business needs (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 64). According to Ngoro and Martins (2019: 121), employees' psychological connection to their work has become increasingly important in the 21st century workplace (Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter 2011) This is especially true because, to stay competitive, businesses must motivate and encourage their people to use their maximum potential in their workplace (Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter 2011; Shuck and Reio 2011). As a result, EE is becoming more prominent on corporate agendas to improve productivity, innovation, business growth, employee retention and commitment (Fearon, McLaughlin and Morris 2013; Sonnentag 2011). Furthermore, engaged staff lead to delighted customers, which leads to increased financial results (Fearon, McLaughlin and Morris 2013). Employee engagement refers to a pleasant work-related psychological state that allows employees to concentrate their efforts on achieving organisational objectives (Fearon, McLaughlin and Morris 2013). Employees must be intellectually and affectively engaged to perform their jobs effectively (Fearon, McLaughlin and Morris 2013; Hallberg and Schaufeli 2006).

HEIs in South Africa are increasingly confronted with difficulties that have ramifications for EE. Increased job demands, from escalating student enrolment, reduced staffing levels, as well as labour and student discontent, are among the issues (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014; Barkhuizen and Rothmann 2006; Bezuidenhout and Bezuidenhout 2014; Myburgh, Poggenpoel and Hastings-Tolsma 2017). As a result, there is a rising demand for empirical evidence in the current higher education arena in terms of the levels of EE most influenced by these difficulties (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014).

The South African higher education system is undergoing significant transformation due to increased demands from social, political, and economic upheavals (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014; Moshoeu and Geldenhuys 2015; Pienaar and Bester 2008). For example, growing employment pressures on university staff members, such as huge class numbers, student unrest, and enrolment of underprepared students, degrade the quality of university staff

members' work lives (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014; Bezuidenhout and Bezuidenhout 2014; Bezuidenhout and Cilliers 2010). Staff experience role conflict due to competing work demands to offer a good education with limited resources. This inhibits positive levels of EE (Bezuidenhout and Bezuidenhout 2014). As indicated in the previous discussion regarding HEIs in South Africa as well as the discussion above, it is evident that over the last decade many of the problems within higher education are still prevalent and are not being attended to, hence remaining stagnant. It is for such reasons that the study highlights the need for research into EE in higher education.

Universities are among the least engaged workplaces in the world, according to Gallup (2016: 2 cited in Bhana and Suknunan, 2019). This could be attributed to them not maximizing the potential of their biggest asset – teachers/lecturers and other employees. According to Rothmann and Jordaan (2006: 87-96 cited in Bhana and Suknunan, 2019), EE research has focused on corporate organisations, with researchers and practitioners paying less attention to engagement in higher education settings. Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008: 322 cited in Bhana and Suknunan, 2019) argue that HEIs must manage and safeguard personnel from elevated levels of stress to preserve employee well-being, organisational performance, and a country's intellectual well-being. However, given that HEIs face equivalent forces of globalisation to corporate organisations (Sullivan, Bartlett and Rana, 2005 cited in Bhana and Suknunan, 2019), the lack of understanding of EE is perplexing. However, only a few studies on EE have been undertaken at HEIs (Field and Buitendach, 2011: 5; Jackson, Rothmann and Van de Vijver, 2006; Rothmann and Jordaan 2005: 263-274 cited in Bhana and Suknunan, 2019: 316). Institutional changes at HEIs, which are critical for transformation, also have a direct impact on the EE (Bezuidenhout and Cilliers, 2010 cited in Bhana, 2019: 316). Academic vigour in South Africa is obviously linked to professional advancement prospects and is inversely related to organisational collaboration (Rothmann and Jordaan 2006: 87-96 cited in Bhana and Suknunan 2019).

Consequently, academics in South Africa are under pressure to produce greater research outputs, teach larger classes, and supervise more postgraduate students. As a result, large workloads with insufficient support and fewer resources necessitate more time and vigour (Bezuidenhout and Cilliers 2010: 1). Furthermore, human resource development in HEIs is critical due to the necessity of retaining talented academic and administrative staff to provide high-quality education (Deligero and Laguador 2014: 909-917). Work engagement, job engagement, personal engagement, organisational engagement, team engagement, psychological engagement, and eventually EE are all terms that have been used interchangeably to reflect the term 'engagement'. (Harris 2018: 35). Harris (2018) conducted a search on ProQuest and discovered that over 97% of all EE literature had, at the time, been written since 2000, and 81% had been written in the previous seven years namely, since 2011. This highlighted the explosion of EE research from the year 2000 and more specifically from 2011 onwards. According to Tauetsile (2021: 1), the importance of the value of EE is strongly supported in both the academic (Kahn 1990; Macey and Schneider 2008; Schaufeli 2013) and practitioner (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002; Robinson, Hayday and Perryman 2004) literature. Research by Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010) showed that engaged employees do perform better. The literature also provides various EE definitions that offer different perspectives (Alfes, Truss, and Soane, Rees and Gatenby 2010; Kahn, 1990; Schaufeli, Salanova and Gonzalez-Roma 2002), and have consistently demonstrated that EE is a multi-dimensional construct. Saks and Gruman (2014) suggest that EE has become a construct and area of research that has captured the interest of both researchers and practitioners alike in a brief period and which does not compare to anything else. Employee Engagement is also associated with numerous positive and desirable consequences. "It is about investing oneself, being authentic in the job, and delivering one's work performance with passion, persistence and energy" (Byrne 2015: 1). The topic of engagement has been and continues to be, a widely discussed topic in both industry and academia, with practice outpacing the research needed to validate the numerous solutions put forward as 'the answer' to the disengagement dilemma.

Byrne (2015: 1) suggests firstly that various research studies, by Gallup (2002, 2013a, 2013b), the Kenexa Research Institute Report (2009) and the Dale Carnegie Organisation Report (2007), invoke fear amongst managers of what happens when you lack engagement. This includes a loss of money, low employee retention, low productivity and not attracting the kind of people who want to work hard for the organisation. Secondly, Byrne (2015: 2) suggests that managers are prompted to care about EE due to peer pressure – everyone is focusing on engagement, therefore it must be important. The novelty of the concept has drawn tremendous interest. Byrne (2015: 2) however, suggests that there are more compelling reasons for caring about engagement. For example: (a) “Employees choose to be engaged – so what is it that drives them to work hard, commit to the goals of the organisation and deliver desired performance in their jobs”; (b) Engagement predicts and explains organisational behaviour such as performance and innovation; (c) “Engagement is related to the health of employees - engaged employees report positive health outcomes”; and (d) “Focusing on EE may be considered a feature of attending to corporate social responsibility and of efforts to re-establish the trust of the public in ethical practices and intentions of organisations” (Byrne, 2015).

Nevertheless, Saks and Gruman (2014) state that EE research has been plagued by two issues. First, many definitions of EE exist, and there is a lack of consensus on what engagement means. Researchers are not able to agree on a name for the construct. There are those that suggest it should be called EE, while others suggest it should be referred to as job engagement (Rich, Lepine and Crawford 2010) or work engagement (Schaufeli and Salanova 2011). Secondly, many instruments have been developed to measure EE, and there are still questions about how to measure engagement and the validity of existing measures. A discussion on the various EE measuring instruments will follow later in this chapter.

There appears to be misunderstanding, disagreement, and a lack of consensus among researchers and practitioners about the meaning and distinctiveness of EE (Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter 2011; Cole, Walter, Bedeian and O'Boyle 2012). This is

due to a conceptual overlap with other well-known categories including job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job involvement (Cole *et al.*, 2012; Saks 2006, Shuck, Ghosh, Zigarmi and Nimon 2013). However, according to Twaetsile (2021), while EE may overlap with other constructs, it is distinct from similar constructs such as organisational commitment (Christian, Garza and Slaughter 2011; Robinson, Hayday and Perryman 2004; Saks 2006), workaholism (Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter and Taris 2008), and job satisfaction (Christian, Garza and Slaughter 2011; Wefald and Downey 2009). With regards to its antecedents, previous studies have also consistently shown that job and personal resources are positively related to EE (Christian, Garza and Slaughter 2011).

According to Twaetsile (2021: 2), many academics concur that certain HRM techniques such as training (Salanova *et al.*, 2010), transformational leadership (Bakker, A.B., Emmerik, H.V. and Euwema 2006), and changing job designs can help firms enhance EE (Bakker 2011). In terms of whether EE is a trait, state, or behaviour, Macey and Schneider (2008) argue that EE is a phrase that could be used in various contexts to refer to psychological characteristics, states, and behaviours that are distinct but related constructs (Twaetsile 2021: 2). According to Macey and Schneider (2008), the notion still lacks specificity, and it will be more effective if it is presented as a model that encompasses the psychological trait, mood, and behaviour it suggests simultaneously. However, scholarly literature agrees that it is a state (Christian, Garza and Slaughter 2011; Schaufeli, Salanova and Gonzalez-Roma 2002) that can change from day to day among individuals (Sonnentag, Dormann and Demerouti 2010).

2.2.2 Defining the concept of employee engagement

“I don’t know how to describe it – I just feel alive. I feel energized, excited, stimulated, almost on edge, and yet I can focus as if nothing else exists. When I’m engaged, I feel connected and feel like I’m doing something that matters; I’m making a difference, even if in a small way. It’s a choice, really, to be that “into” my job – I

wasn't always this way and I'm not always 100% in this mode". Interview 45, (Byrne 2022: 17). Employee engagement, often known as job or work engagement, is a hot topic in academia and practice. According to popular definitions, engagement is a motivating state linked to several desirable and positive outcomes for businesses, including elevated levels of job performance and positive attitudes like job satisfaction. Employee engagement is putting yourself into your work, acting honestly, and performing your duties with passion, perseverance, excitement, and energy. Without a doubt, there are numerous ways to define EE at work, making it a complicated issue to define and examine. Industry-specific engagement seems to show up in a variety of ways, resisting early attempts to define it in a clear-cut fashion. As a result, despite the recent increase in research articles and books presenting definitions of engagement, many authors continue to refer to engagement in terms of what it is, as opposed to what it looks like (for example, high performance) (Byrne 2022: 17).

2.2.2.1 Multiple definitions of employee engagement

A major challenge presented by the literature is the lack of a universal definition of EE (Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane and Truss 2008). In support of this, Markos and Sridevi (2010) and Markos and Gossaye (2021) confirm that currently there is no single unitary definition of the term EE. Scholars from various academic circles have defined EE in different ways (Shuck 2020: 7). According to Shuck (2020: 7), it would be extremely difficult to "find two different authors who referred to the same definition, positionality, or even meaning." The consequence of this has meant the meaning of engagement has "remained unapologetically disconnected throughout its existence." Although different definitions, concepts, and terminologies have frequently been used by scholars to bring clarity, their application has sadly led to misunderstanding. In reviewing the historical evolution of the engagement construct, this has been done in a sincere attempt to advance the construct, but there is still misunderstanding (Shuck 2020: 8). For Kahn (1990) as cited in Ram and Prabhakar (2011), engagement is making use of and tying organisational members to their roles at work.

People make use of and convey themselves emotionally, cognitively, and physically during functional performances in engagement. Contemporary, scholarly definitions of EE suggest that the construct consists of three separate facets: cognitive engagement (Kahn1990), emotional engagement (Saks 2006) and behavioural engagement (Macey and Schneider 2008). Similar views are also expressed by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), Robertson and Cooper (2010), Stander and Rothman (2010) and Ariani (2013). EE does however appear to lack a certain level of consistency in definition and application across fields (Shuck and Wollard 2010, cited in Shoko 2014). Schohat and Vigoda-Gadot (2010) and Shuck and Reio (2011), also suggest that EE is a reconceptualisation of other well-researched variables (meaning 'old wine in a new bottle'). In addition to this, much of the research on engagement is grounded in job-burnout research (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter 2001) thus making it difficult to distinguish EE from burnout (Cole *et al.*, 2012). Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019: 64) state that despite the extensive amount of research around the concept of engagement, there continues to be a lack of consistency in its definitions, measures, antecedents, and outcomes. The author also suggests that due to cultural differences, the same engagement techniques are also not necessarily applicable in all countries.

2.2.2.2 Challenges with defining employee engagement

Because numerous definitions exist, determining the level of EE knowledge is challenging because each study investigates EE from a distinct perspective. However, there is widespread agreement that EE refers to an employee's enthusiasm and dedication to the organisation and their job, as well as the drive to achieve the organisation's goals by going beyond (Kruse 2012: 2). Engagement is not transactional – it is about emotion, behaviours, and relationships; there is a connection between the employee and the organisation. Engaged employees have pride in their jobs and the organisation and are more likely to recommend the organisation, its products and services to others. Of all the theories about what engagement is and what drives it, there seems to be agreement that trust is one of

the key drivers (MacLeod 2015). This is applicable at numerous levels within the organisation: work group, line manager, senior leaders, systems, and processes. (O'Byrne 2013: 9). Saks and Gruman (2014: 159) have concluded that there are two key definitions of engagement in academic literature: Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli *et al.* (2002). They state that both have similarities and overlap with regards to engagement being a motivational state but that there are several differences in the definitions as well. "Researchers using Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement refer to it as 'employee engagement' and retain the foundational characteristic of harnessing the self into the work role" (Byrne 2022: 30). Most researchers using the "opposite of burnout" perspective of engagement employ Schaufeli *et al.*'s (2002) simplified definition... but they call it *work* engagement instead of *employee* engagement (Byrne 2022: 31). Kahn's (1990) definition is much more encompassing, as it includes the notion of "personal agency" (one's capability to originate and direct actions for given purposes. It is influenced by the belief in one's effectiveness in performing specific tasks, which is termed self- efficacy, as well as by one's actual skill) and the "agentic self" (the aspect of human personality that is determined by future assessments of one's goals, objectives, and actions) (Cole *et al.*, 2012, cited in Saks and Gruman 2014: 159). Saks and Gruman (2014) state further that because it requires putting the entire self in a role, Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement suggests something more distinct and unique. Furthermore, according to Kahn (1990), engagement entails a deliberate decision by individuals about how much of their genuine selves they will contribute to the part they are playing. Thus, Kahn's (1990) immersive definition and conceptualisation of engagement is far more comprehensive and detailed than Schaufeli *et al.*'s (2002) definition. Furthermore, while there is evidence that engagement is separate from job attitudes such as job satisfaction, the Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) conceptualisation and definition may be so similar to burnout that its distinctness is called into doubt (Saks and Gruman 2014: 159-160).

2.2.3 Employee engagement in the public and higher education sectors

In the context of the present study, it is also critical to note that engagement is just as relevant to the public and higher education sectors as the private sector. The impact of overworked, stressed, and demotivated staff is far more serious in the higher education sector than in a supermarket or call centre. It is also critical to note that, with reference to the discussion on the two main definitions of engagement above, research on the concept in the public or higher education sector indicates a limited number of studies that make use of Kahn's definition of engagement (Shoko 2014; Blakey 2017; Ahmed 2018; Pham-Thai, McMurray, Muenjohn and Muchiri 2018) while Schaufeli *et al's.* (2002) definition of engagement appears to be more popular with engagement studies in higher education (Barkhuizen and Rothmann 2006; Coetzee and Rothmann 2005; Rothmann and Jordaan 2006; Boyd, Bakker, Pignata, Winefield, Gillespie and Stough 2011; Barkhuizen, Rothmann, and Van de Vijer 2014; Hakeem and Gulzar 2015; Byrne and MacDonagh 2017; Mercali and Costa 2018; Diedricks, Cilliers, and Bezuidenhout 2019; Borst, Kruyen, and Lako 2019; O'Day 2020; Naidoo-Chetty and du Plessis 2021; Nuamcharoen and Javakorn 2021; Theron 2022). The current study, based within the higher education sector, therefore uses and applies Schaufeli *et al's.* (2002: 74) definition of engagement as: "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption." The type of engagement predominant in HE appears to be that of job or work engagement. In addition, the literature also reveals extensive research related to higher education as using either the Burnout-Engagement Model of Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), or the Job Demands-Resources Model of Bakker and Demerouti (2007). A discussion on the various models within EE follows later in the chapter and the applicable model/s used for the present study are subsequently illuminated.

One can therefore state that EE is now firmly embedded in the collective consciousness of the human resources management community as seen in the proliferation of conferences, events and LinkedIn groups dedicated to EE. (O'Byrne

2013: 8). As for the future of engagement, that now seems to be more about sustaining it, rather than finding the latest human resources theory about how to attract, motivate and retain good employees. Engagement has reached the point in its growth where it requires clarity and consistency of definition, delivery, and measurement (O'Byrne 2013: 11). Employee engagement is therefore a difficult concept to describe and study as it seems to manifest in diverse ways, defying initial attempts to box it into a single and simple definition (Byrne 2022: 18).

2.2.4 Perspectives of employee engagement

As an extension of the EE concept, it is essential to look at the perspectives of various authors and researchers to provide additional clarification on EE definitions. "The one thing everyone knows about engagement is that nobody agrees what it is" (Briner 2014: 52). Briner (2014: 52) refers to a study by McLeod and Clarke (2009) where it was stated that: "There is no one agreed definition of employee engagement – during the course of this review we have come across more than 50 definitions." Not only are there numerous definitions of engagement, but, more importantly, they are quite different as indicated in Robertson-Smith and Marwick (2009). "Some definitions focus on employee behaviour (e.g., discretionary effort), some on employee attitudes (e.g., commitment), some on employee feelings (e.g., enthusiasm), some on the conditions of work and what the organisation does (e.g., provides support), some on various combinations of these, and yet others define engagement as a situation in which one of these things, such as attitudes, causes another, such as behaviour" (Briner 2014: 52).

An extensive review of the literature on EE indicates that there are various perspectives to support the detailed understanding of EE definitions and concepts amongst scholars, organisations, and different countries (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019; Motyka 2018; Osam 2018; Bailey, Madden, Alfes and Fletcher, 2017; Anitha 2014; Saks and Gruman 2014; Nienaber and Martins 2016).

A brief overview now follows of the main perspectives based on the literature reviewed by the researcher.

2.2.4.1 Kahn (1990)

Kahn (1990: 694 cited in Kular Gatenby, Rees, Soane and Truss 2008), who coined the concept of engagement, defines the term, 'Personal Engagement' as "the harnessing of organisational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances." The cognitive aspect of EE is related to an employee's beliefs about an organisation, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect is about the employee's feelings towards each of these three factors and whether they have a positive or negative attitude toward the organisation and its leaders. The physical aspect concerns the physical energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their roles. According to Kahn (1990 cited in Kular *et al.*, 2008), "engagement means to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organisational role." Kahn (1990, cited in Anitha (2014: 309) added that three psychological engagement conditions are necessary for an employee to be fully engaged: meaningfulness (work elements), safety (social elements, including management style, process, and organisational norms) and availability (individual distractions). However, after Kahn introduced this concept, various researchers put forward different definitions that resulted in the development of various perspectives relating to EE and reflecting their understanding thereof. Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) therefore suggested that in an organisational context, the concept of EE should be represented as follows:

- Employee engagement as a multi-faceted construct (May, Gilson and Harter 2004; Wellins and Concelman 2005; Saks 2006; Macey and Schneider 2008; Bakker 2011; Soane, Truss, Alfes, Shantz, Rees and Gatenby 2012)
- Employee engagement as a dedicated willingness (Hewitt Organisation 2001; Towers Organisation 2001)

- Employee engagement as a positive state of mind (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker 2002; Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002)
- Employee engagement as the opposite of burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter 2001; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004; Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker and Lloret 2006; Demerouti, Mostert and Bakker 2010).

The four perspectives as indicated by Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019) and listed above, provide organisations with a clear understanding of the multi-faceted nature of EE and the impact thereof on the organisation and its employees. In the interest of clarity, the various perspectives of EE in different time periods will be discussed below.

2.2.4.2 Perspectives of employee engagement for the period 1999-2004

After Kahn's (1990) theory of EE, another popular perspective of EE which appeared in the literature, is that of the Gallup organisation's Buckingham and Coffman (1999) who introduced the term "employee engagement". They stated that engagement is driven by having "the right people in the right roles with the right managers" (Anitha 2014: 309). Rothbard (1999 cited in Shoko 2014: 15) agreed with Kahn (1990) and likened engagement to "psychological presence" going on to say that engagement involves two key aspects: *absorption and attention*. *Attention* is the "cognitive availability" and amount of time that a person spends contemplating a role. *Absorption* refers to "one's intensity of focus on a role and being firmly engrossed in a role" (Shoko 2014: 15).

Saks and Gruman (2014: 158) stated that another influential perspective of EE has its roots in job burnout literature and describes engagement as the opposite or positive antithesis of burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter 2001). Engagement is characterised by energy, involvement, and efficacy - the direct opposite of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy. According to Maslach and Leiter (2008: 498), engagement is "an energetic state of involvement with personally fulfilling activities

that enhance one's sense of professional efficacy" (cited in Saks and Gruman 2014). Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001 cited in Saks and Gruman, 2014) state that burnout involves the erosion of engagement with one's job. Research on burnout and engagement (Gonzalez-Roma *et al.*, 2006) has found that the core dimensions of burnout (exhaustion and cynicism) and engagement (vigour and dedication) are indeed opposites of each other (Saks and Gruman, 2014: 158). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004 cited in Meyer and Schneider 2021) assert that burnout and engagement are opposites of each other. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) stated that vigour and dedication are direct opposites of exhaustion and cynicism (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 66). Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) assert that burnout and engagement are independent states, but engagement is still the opposite of burnout. (Saks and Gruman 2014: 158).

In contrast to other researchers, the seminal study by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) referred to the term "work engagement" and described it as "a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption" (as cited in Osam 2018: 35). Vigour involves elevated levels of energy and mental resilience while working; dedication refers to being strongly involved in one's work and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm and challenge; and absorption refers to being fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work (Saks and Gruman 2014: 158). The major difference between this form of engagement and EE is the lack of the cognitive element (Shuck, Osam, Zigarmi and Nimon 2017). Osam (2018: 36) states that work engagement focuses solely on the emotional and physical elements associated with burnout. According to Sun and Bunchapattanasakda (2019), Schaufeli's (2002) description of engagement highlights that engagement is not just a momentary and specific state but rather it is "a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any specific object, event, individual or behaviour." Bakker and Demerouti (2008) stated that consequently, "engaged employees have high levels of energy and are enthusiastic about their work" and "are often fully immersed in their work so that time flies" (Saks and Gruman 2014). A recent study by Motyka (2018) conducted a systematic review of the

literature on EE and the results indicated that most authors (76% of all publications reviewed) adopted the definition proposed by Schaufeli's *et al.* (2002) seminal study. Gonzalez-Roma *et al.* (2006) expanded two groups of opposite dimensions (emotional exhaustion-vigour and cynicism-dedication) as two different and latent dimensions (energy and identity) (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019). Demerouti, Mostert and Bakker (2010) state that cynicism and dedication are two ends of the "identity" dimension, while emotional exhaustion and vigour are not supported as two ends of the "energy" dimension. (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019). A further perspective provided by the Towers Organisation (2001) stated that EE is "the degree of willingness and ability of employees to help companies succeed, dividing it into rational engagement and sensuous engagement" (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 65). Rational engagement generally refers to the relationship between the employee and the company, reflected in the employee's understanding of their role and the department's role. "When work can bring money, professional skills or personal development and other benefits, employees will generate a sense of rational engagement" (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019). Sensuous engagement depends on employee satisfaction, and the sense of self-achievement an employee obtains from the job as a member of the organisation.

The Gallup organisation (2002), one of the most widely recognised names associated with EE due to their best-selling book, *First Break All the Rules*, describes engaged employees as those who "work with a passion and feel a profound connection to their company" and "drive innovation and move the organisation forward" (Gallup Management Journal 2006, cited in Antony 2018: 32). According to Gallup (2002) there are three types of people: engaged employees, not engaged employees, and actively disengaged employees. Engaged employees consistently strive for excellence within their roles. Not engaged employees focus on the tasks given to them instead of the goals of the organisation. This means they do what they are told to do. Actively disengaged employees are dangerous individuals who not only do not perform well but also demotivate the performer in the organisation. These employees are toxic to the organisation (Anitha 2014).

Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002, as cited in Antony 2018: 32) described EE as “the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with, as well as enthusiasm for work.” Luthans and Peterson (2002) utilised Kahn’s (1990) definition of engagement and found a conceptual fit between Gallup’s Workplace Audit (GWA) and Kahn’s (1990) qualitatively derived dimensions of engagement (Welch 2011). May, Gilson and Harter (2004, cited in Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019), stated that EE reflects “how an organisation’s members devote themselves to work, and includes not only cognition, but also the flexible application of emotions and behaviours.” Hewitt Associates LLC (2004) referred to EE as “the state in which individuals are emotionally and intellectually committed to the organisation or group, as measured by three primary behaviours: (a) ‘Say’: employees use positive language to describe their company, colleagues and jobs; (b) ‘Stay’: employees strongly hope to be a member of the company, want to stay in the company for a long time, instead of using existing jobs as a temporary transition; and (c) ‘Strive’: employees are willing to devote extra effort to work for the success of the company” (as cited in Anitha 2014: 309). Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004) describe engagement as “a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the business context, works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must develop and nurture engagement, which is a two-way relationship between employer and employee.” Robinson, Hayday and Perryman (2004) say that engagement overlaps with Organisational Commitment (OC) and Organisational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB), but that it is a two-way relationship. It is therefore “one step up” from OC (Little and Little 2006: 113).

2.2.4.3 Perspectives of employee engagement for the period 2005-2012

Wellins and Concelman (2005, cited in Antony 2018) describe EE as, “the illusive force that motivates employees to higher levels of performance.” While Saks (2006: 602), described engagement as “a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with individual

role performance” (cited in Bailey, Madden, Alfes and Fletcher 2017). Saks (2006) is said to have distinguished between job engagement and organisational engagement and went on to confirm that engagement is distinguishable from several related constructs such as organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour and job involvement. Truss, Soane, Edwards, Wisdom, Croll and Burnett (2006) supported a survey report published by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) titled *How engaged are British employees?* Their study is linked with Kahn (1990), Luthans and Peterson (2002) and May, Gilson and Harter (2004) and summarises the understanding of EE as a psychological state, “a passion for work” (Welch, 2011: 334). Truss *et al.* (2006) identify with Kahn’s (1990) three dimensions of EE namely, emotional engagement, cognitive engagement, and physical engagement (Welch 2011). Fleming and Asplund (2007) are Gallup researchers who described EE as “the ability to capture the heads, hearts and souls of your employees to instil an intrinsic desire and passion for excellence,” thus adding a *spiritual element* to Gallup’s established cognitive and emotional aspects of engagement (Anitha 2014: 310). Macey and Schneider (2008 cited in Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 65) regard EE as “a wide-ranging term which contains different types of engagement (trait engagement, psychological state engagement and behavioural engagement), and each one needs different conceptualisations such as a proactive personality (traits engagement), involvement (psychological state engagement), and organisational citizenship behaviour (behavioural engagement).” On the other hand, Schaufeli and Bakker (2010) describe work engagement as “the psychological state that accompanies the behavioural investment of personal energy” (Anitha, 2014: 309).

Shuck and Wollard (2010) described engagement as “a cognitive, emotional, and behavioural state directed toward desired organisational outcomes” (Motyka 2018: 233). Albrecht (2010) defined EE as a “positive work-related psychological state characterised by a genuine willingness to contribute to organisational success” (Welch 2011: 331). Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010) built on Kahn’s (1990) description of engagement and noted that when individuals are engaged, they invest

their hands, head, and heart in their performance. They argue that engagement is a more complete representation of the self than other constructs such as job satisfaction and job involvement, which represent much narrower aspects of the self (Saks and Gruman 2014: 157). Therefore, according to Rich, LePine and Crawford (2010), Kahn's (1990) description regards engagement as a "multidimensional motivational construct that involves the simultaneous investment of an individual's complete and full self into the performance of a role" (Saks and Gruman 2014: 158). Bakker (2011) referred to engagement as a "positive, highly awakened emotional state" consisting of two features – energy and involvement (cited in Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 65).

According to Christian, Garza and Slaughter (2011), some researchers (Saks 2008; Newman and Harrison 2008; Christian, Garza and Slaughter 2011) have expressed concerns about the distinctiveness of engagement from similar constructs. Too many researchers adopt a simplistic view by stating that engagement is the opposite of burnout. Is engagement a different and unique construct? This has led to some researchers trying to show that engagement is unique by comparing it to other constructs. For example, Christian, Garza and Slaughter (2011) described how engagement is distinguishable from job satisfaction (an attitude about one's job or job situation), organisational commitment (an emotional attachment to one's organisation) and job involvement (the degree to which one's job is central to one's identity). They regard engagement as a higher order motivational construct. The authors reviewed the engagement literature and identified three characteristics of engagement: (a) a psychological connection with the performance of work tasks, (b) the self-investment of personal resources in work and (c) a "state" rather than a "trait". They described engagement as a "broad construct that involves a holistic investment of the entire self in terms of cognitive, emotional and physical energies". They also note that engagement does differ from other constructs as it is broader, involves a holistic investment of the entire self; focuses on work performed at a job; and involves a willingness to dedicate physical, cognitive, and emotional resources to one's job (Saks and Gruman 2014: 158). Soane *et al.* (2012) "developed a model of

EE that identified three requirements: a work-role focus, activation and positive affect” (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 65).

Table 2.2 indicates the key perspectives on EE as discussed earlier, highlighting the overlaps and differences relating to some of the characteristics underlying the concept. From the various perspectives, it is evident that the most common characteristics are those identified by Kahn (1990), namely, the cognitive/head, emotional/heart, and physical/behavioural components. Most of the perspectives related to Kahn’s Need-Satisfying approach and Gallup’s Satisfaction-Engagement approach, identify either all or some of these elements as making up engagement. The perspectives linked to the Burnout-Antithesis approach, highlight through the concepts of vigour, dedication and absorption, the emotional and physical components of EE and do not include a cognitive dimension. To a lesser extent, other researchers have also introduced additional elements such as attention, attitude, spirituality, traits, rationality, and intellectuality. These perspectives subsequently gave rise to various trends within the study of engagement from personal engagement to employee engagement, to job and work engagement, to trait engagement and finally to organisational engagement. A discussion of some of these trends follows below. These trends reveal the Need-Satisfying Approach as referring to Personal Engagement (PE), the Satisfaction-Engagement approach as referring to Employee Engagement (EE), the Burnout-Antithesis approach as referring to Job Engagement (JE) and Work Engagement (WE), the Multidimensional approach as referring to EE, JE, and Organisational Engagement (OE), and finally the Trait approach as referring to Trait-based Engagement.

Table 2.2: Critical perspectives of employee engagement: Cross-referencing table of key characteristics/dimensions

AUTHORS/RESEARCHERS	CHARACTERISTICS									
	Cognitive/Head	Dedication/ Absorption/ Emotional/Heart	Physical/ behavioural/vigour/ Hand	Attitude	Attention/ absorption	Spiritual	Trait	Rationale	Sensuous	Intellectual
KAHN (1990) – personal engagement – physical, emotional, and cognitive	X	X	X							
BUCKINGHAM AND COFFMAN (GALLUP 1999) – GWA questionnaire	X	X								
ROTHBARD (1999)	X				X					
TOWERS ORGANISATION (2001) – Rational and sensuous								X	X	
MASLACH, SCHAUFELI AND LEITER (2001) (Energy/Exhaustion, Involvement/Cynicism and Efficacy/ Ineffectiveness)	X	X	X							
GALLUP ORGANISATION (2002) – Engaged, not engaged, and actively disengaged employees	X	X								
LUTHANS AND PETERSON (2002) – same as Kahn but using the GWA tool for measurement	X	X	X							
HARTER, SCHMIDT AND HAYES (2002) – Kahn and GWA tool for measurement - Involvement, Satisfaction and Enthusiasm	X	X								
SCHAUFELI, SALANOVA, GONZALEZ-ROMA AND BAKKER (2002) – Vigour/physical, dedication/emotional and absorption/attention		X	X		X					
SCHAUFELI AND BAKKER (2004) - Vigour/physical, dedication/emotional and absorption/attention		X	X		X					
MAY, GILSON AND HARTER (2004) – physical, emotional and cognitive	X	X	X							
HEWITT ASSOCIATES LLC (2004) – say, stay and strive: emotional, intellectual, and behavioural		X	X							X
WELLINS AND CONCELMAN (2005) – illusive force		X		X						
ROBINSON, PERRYMAN AND HAYDAY (2004) – linked to Kahn (1990) and Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) – physical and attitude			X	X						
SAKS (2006) – Same as Kahn but includes job and organisational engagement – cognitive, emotional and behavioural	X	X	X							
GONZALEZ-ROMA, SCHAUFELI, BAKKER AND LIORET (2006) – Vigour and Dedication		X	X							
TRUSS, SOANE, EDWARDS, WISDOM, CROLL AND BURNETT (2006) – psychological state; same as Kahn(1990); May et al (2004)	X	X	X							
FLEMING AND ASPLUND (2007) -Head/cognitive, Heart/emotional and Soul /spiritual– desire and passion for excellence	X	X				X				
MACEY AND SCHNEIDER (2008) – Trait, state and behavioural constructs including work and organisational conditions	X	X	X				X			
BAKKER AND DEMEROUTI (2008) – vigour, dedication and absorption – high levels of energy and enthusiasm		X	X		X					
SHUCK AND WOLLARD (2010)	X	X	X							
CRAWFORD, LePINE, AND RICH (2010)	X	X	X							
ALBRECHT (2010) – psychological state and willingness to contribute to organisational success	X	X								
SCHAUFELI AND BAKKER (2010) – psychological state and behavioural construct (personal energy)	X	X	X							
BAKKER (2011)		X	X		X					

2.2.5 An overview of the main employee engagement trends represented in a periodical breakdown

The foundations of EE have their roots in the early 1990s and is well documented in the studies of authors such as Kahn (1990), Rothbard (1999), Coffman, Gopal and Gonzalez-Molina (Gallup 2002), Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), Saks (2006), Macey and Schneider (2008). In the last decade several studies have emerged, such as Robertson and Cooper (2010), Markos and Sridevi (2010), Ram and Prabhakar (2011) Shuck and Reio (2011), Ariani (2013), Byrne (2015), and Khadilkar (2017) which identify the on-going importance of EE in both the public and private sector as a research topic. According to Markos and Sridevi (2010), most studies connect EE to survey houses and consultancies and the concept is less regarded as an academic conceptual element. The authors identify the origins of EE in two concepts academically recognised, acclaimed and subjects of empirical research – OC and OCB. However, Rafferty, Maben, West, and Robinson (2005, cited in Shoko 2014) distinguish EE from the concepts of OC and OCB, on the basis that EE is a two-way interdependent process between the organisation and employee while these two concepts focus only on the employee. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) also established that the concept of EE emerged from research relating to employee burnout and was a general response to the increasing popularity of positive work psychology by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, cited in Nienaber and Martins 2016: 1).

Although the first major article to appear in the management literature on EE was Kahn's (1990) paper on the ethnographic study of personal engagement and disengagement almost 33 years ago, it was not cited in its first 20 years. Saks and Gruman (2014) stated that Kahn's (1990) article had over 1800 citations at the time. A recent check on Google Scholar (September 2023) indicates that the article currently has over 17,000 citations – an 89% increase in the number of citations since 2014. In the decade 2004 to 2014 there was an explosion of research activity and heightened interest in EE among management scholars, consultants, and organisations. This was due to claims that EE is a critical factor for organisational

success and competitive advantage. (Macey, Schneider, Barbera and Young 2009; Rich, LePine and Crawford 2010, cited in Saks and Gruman 2014). Thus, the literature on engagement is still new and only developed extensively after about 2004.

Saks and Gruman (2014) identified two key themes since the emergence of EE in the management literature: firstly, EE is key to organisational success and competitiveness (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002; Crawford, LePine and Rich 2010); and secondly, actual EE is declining with evidence of deepening disengagement amongst employees (Bates 2004; Richman 2006). According to Saks and Gruman (2014), studies in the USA indicated that half of all Americans in the workforce are either not fully engaged or are totally disengaged. This is referred to as the “Engagement Gap” which has resulted in huge losses in productivity. A more recent Gallup poll of over 67,000 people conducted in 2022, revealed that only 32% of workers are engaged with their employment, down from 36% in 2020. The proportion of workers who are “actively disengaged” has increased since 2020, while the proportion of those who are “not engaged” has remained stable (Harter 2023: 1). However, in South Africa, the Bateleur Employee Engagement Survey (2020) consisting of 6,848 respondents from various demographic profiles, industries, and employment positions, indicated a 12,6% increase in EE between 2019 and 2020, from 46% to approximately 58%. The proportion of those who are “actively disengaged” decreased by 9%, while the proportion of those classified as “neutral” or “not engaged” decreased by 4%. The survey concludes that the shock of the lockdown and its adverse economic consequences appears to have jolted most of South Africa's employment base into a state of heightened energy and workplace engagement. A more recent survey by Culture Amp (2023), has revealed that 73% of South Africans are engaged, which places South Africa in the top 50%, compared with other regions. The survey results also reflected that people working in South Africa are more engaged than those from Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, and Norway, but less engaged than those from Vietnam, Mexico, Columbia, and India.

2.2.5.1 Period one: Development of the main trends relating to employee engagement from 1990-1999

Table 2.3: Main trends relating to employee engagement - period one

PERIOD	AUTHOR / RESEARCHER	ENGAGEMENT CONCEPT	SUMMARY
PERIOD 1 (1990-1999)	Kahn (1990; 1992)	Personal Engagement	"...the harnessing of organisational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances".
	Buckingham and Coffman – Gallup (1999)	Employee Engagement	...engaged employees drive customer loyalty and "...the right people in the right roles with the right managers drive employee engagement". A fully engaged employee is one who answers YES to all 12 questions on Gallup's workplace questionnaire

2.2.5.1.1 Kahn (1990; 1992)

The origins of the concept of EE can be found in the writings of Kahn (1990). The first reference to engagement in the workplace appears in an *Academy of Management Journal* article titled "Psychological Conditions of Personal Engagement and Disengagement at Work" (Kahn 1990). Kahn's (1990) paper was the first scientific work on engagement. He is seen as the father of the EE movement due to the influence of his work on later studies, but he does not refer to the term EE. Kahn's (1990) study is based on the term personal engagement, which he defines in his 1990 paper (Welch, 2011: 332). Kahn proposed that personal engagement refers to "the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performance." Physical engagement refers to the energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their roles while psychological engagement refers to focusing on the job mentally while performing a role in the organisation. In Shuck and Wollard (2009), it is stated that Kahn explains the

underpinnings and major influences on his thought, beginning with the classic sociology text, *the presentation of self in everyday life* by Goffman (1961). Shuck and Wollard (2009) suggest that Goffman (1961) heavily influenced Kahn's (1990) writing as he suggested that "people act out momentary attachments and detachments in role performances" (Kahn 1990), a direct reference to Goffman's (1961) internationalist theory. According to Shuck and Wollard (2009), Kahn (1990) described personal engagement as "the simultaneous employment and expression of a person's 'preferred self' in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, personal presence, and active full role performances". The aforementioned authors also state that Kahn (1990) proposed that the domains of meaningfulness, safety and availability are important to fully understand why a person becomes engaged. Kahn (1990) describes meaningfulness as the positive "sense of return on investments of self in role performance". He also described safety as the ability to show oneself "without fear or negative consequences to self-image, status, or career" and availability as the "sense of possessing the physical, emotional and physiological resources necessary" for the completion of work (Shuck and Wollard 2009).

2.2.5.1.2 Gallup (1999) – Buckingham and Coffman

The 1990s saw the beginnings of practitioner interest and the widespread use of the term EE. The consultancy firm Gallup has been widely credited with coining the term in 1999 (Little and Little 2006, cited in Welch 2011: 332). Gallup conducted extensive interviews and surveys of employees and managers with the intention of creating a measure of workplaces that could be used to make suitable comparisons (Little and Little 2006). Gallup's Buckingham and Coffman (1999: 248) introduced the term EE in their book "First Break All the Rules" claiming that engaged employees drive customer loyalty and that: "The right people in the right roles with the right managers drive employee engagement" (cited in Welch 2011: 332). The reference in the book to the term EE created an overnight sensation amongst businesspeople (Shuck and Wollard 2010, cited in Welch 2011).

According to Welch (2011), practitioner interest in the concept “prompted demand for and provision of EE consultancy services”. Buckingham and Coffman (1999) described a fully engaged employee as one who could answer yes to all 12 questions on Gallup’s workplace questionnaire. These statistically derived items, previously identified as the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA), “measure EE and are related to productivity, profitability, employee retention and customer service at the business unit level (hospital, hotel, factory, etc)”. According to the GWA, employees who score high on the questions are “emotionally engaged” in the work and the organisation (Little and Little 2006: 112). Although Gallup was the first to coin the term Employee Engagement, the construct did not evolve in the practitioner research over the years (Kunte and Rungruang 2018: 443).

2.2.5.2 Period two: Development of the main employee engagement trends from 2000-2005

Table 2.4: Development of the main employee engagement trends-period two

PERIOD	AUTHOR/RESEARCHER	ENGAGEMENT CONCEPT	SUMMARY
PERIOD 2 (2000-2005)	Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001)	Job burnout/ Job Engagement	engagement is characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy which are direct opposites of the burnout dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism and ineffectiveness
	Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli, (2001)	Work Engagement	Introduced the JD-R model and the UWES to measure engagement. Proposed two job characteristics – job demands and job resources – that affect employee well-being. Job demands lead to exhaustion, and the absence of job resources leads to disengagement.
	Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002)	Employee Engagement	engagement only happens when individuals are “emotionally connected” to others and “cognitively vigilant”; it is understood to be “the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with and enthusiasm for work activities”. Used the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) which consists of 12 items, to measure EE.
	Schaufeli <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Job Engagement	Engagement is “...a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption”. Built on the work of Maslach (2001) and provided the most widely used definition of engagement.
	Luthans and Peterson (2002)	Employee Engagement	Empirical academic study confirming a conceptual fit between Gallup’s GWA and Kahn’s (1990) dimensions of engagement using Kahn’s definition of engagement.
	May, Gilson and Harter (2004)	Work and Employee Engagement	First study to empirically test and validate Kahn’s (1990) findings. Showed that meaningfulness, safety and availability were “important in determining one’s engagement at work”
	Hewitt Associates LLC (2004)	Employee Engagement	“...the state in which individuals are emotionally and intellectually committed to the organisation or group, as measured by three primary behaviours: (a) “Say”: employees use positive language to describe their company, colleagues and jobs; (b) “Stay”: employees strongly hope to be a member of the company, want to stay in the company for a long time, instead of using existing jobs as a temporary transition; and (c) “Strive”: employees are willing to devote extra effort to work for the success of the company”
	Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)	Job Engagement	Engagement is “...a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption”. See Schaufeli <i>et al.</i> (2002). Stated that engagement arose from research on burnout. Tested the work of previous researchers such as Maslach and Leiter (1997). Developed and validated the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) which is used as the ‘preferred measurement based on extensive empirical research studies that have shown its psychometric properties to assess engagement’.

The second period (see Table 2.4) saw a surge in the number of practitioner studies and a groundswell of interest from academics. Consultancy firms established a strong link between high engagement and high business performance (Hewitt Associates LLC 2004, cited in Welch 2011: 332). Key studies during this period included the following:

2.2.5.2.1 Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001)

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter's (2001) work was the first major theory on EE after Kahn (1990) and is one of two developmental theories on EE (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 96). Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of personal engagement would be the only literature on engagement until the early 2000s when Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) began conceptualising why employees developed job burnout. This key scientific study by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) was influenced by the emergence of the positive psychology movement that focused on human strength and optimal functioning as opposed to illness and dysfunction.

Traditional psychological research was seen as focussing too much on the negative states of people, for example burnout as opposed to the positive states such as engagement (Welch 2011: 333; Nienaber and Martins 2016: 1). The focus switch prompted academic work on engagement during this period (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter 2001; Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes 2002; May, Gilson and Harter 2004). Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001: 417) posited that EE was the positive antithesis to burnout and defined EE as "a persistent positive affective state... characterised by high levels of activation and pleasure" (cited in Shuck and Wollard 2010: 99). Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) referred to the term job engagement and its link to job burnout. The study stated that job engagement was characterised by energy, involvement and efficacy which are direct opposites of the burnout dimensions namely, exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness (Welch 2011). Job engagement provides a more complex and thorough perspective on an individual's relationship with work.

This study was a major precursor to engagement research in burnout studies (Kunte and Rungruang 2018: 441). Together, Kahn (1990) and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) provided the two earliest theoretical frameworks for understanding EE (Saks 2006, cited in Shuck and Wollard 2010: 99).

2.2.5.2.2 Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli (2001)

Advancement in work engagement research occurred with the introduction of the Job Demands and Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner and Schaufeli 2001) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli *et al.* 2002). Since then, numerous studies have been conducted based on the JD-R model by using the UWES as a measurement instrument (Kunte and Rungruang 2018: 441). The model proposed two job characteristics – job demands and job resources – that affect employee well-being. Job demands lead to exhaustion, and the absence of job resources leads to disengagement. The model stated that job demands are not inherently negative; however, they may turn into job stressors if the resources needed to compensate the demands are not *enough*. Extensions to the JD-R model were later introduced in the form of personal resources (Xanthapoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli 2007, cited in Kunte and Rungruang 2018). According to Kunte and Rungruang (2018), the JD-R model has links to previous studies such as the demands control model of Karasek (1979) and the effort-reward imbalance model by Siegrist (1996). The study by Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010) expanded the JD-R model to include two types of job demands – “challenge and hindrance demands” – with respect to the way they tend to be appraised by the employees (Kunte and Rungruang 2018: 442). Schaufeli (2012) stated that the JD-R model is “one of the most often used models to explain engagement and the UWES scale is, similarly, the most popular used engagement scale” (Kunte and Rungruang 2018: 442).

2.2.5.2.3 Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002)

The study by Harter, Schmidt, and Hayes (2002) is also an outgrowth of the positive psychology movement of the early 21st century (Shuck 2011: 311). It is regarded as “one of the earliest and most definitive pieces of practitioner literature on employee engagement” (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 99) and “one of the most widely read and cited pieces of literature on employee engagement” (Shuck 2011: 311). Their description of EE was based on the empirical studies conducted by the Gallup Research Group, popularised by the publication of *First break all the rules* (Buckingham and Coffman 1999).

According to Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002), engagement only happens when individuals are “emotionally connected” to others and “cognitively vigilant”; it is understood to be “the individual’s involvement and satisfaction with and enthusiasm for work activities” (cited in Nienaber and Martins 2016: 6). Shuck and Wollard (2010: 99) suggest that this description “added the expectation of an individual’s satisfaction level, significantly changing the way engagement was viewed”.

Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) were the first to look at EE at the business unit level, linking higher levels of EE to increased business outcomes (profit) (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 99). There may be some overlap between their description of EE and those of other well-known constructs, but they claim that real engagement should happen on a “regular day-to-day basis and be actively applied in people’s work behaviour” (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 7).

Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) used the GWA which consists of 12 items, to measure EE. They initially presented the GWA as a “12-item measure of employee perceptions of work characteristics with an additional question about overall satisfaction with the organisation as a place to work” (Welch 2011: 332). Through their research, they found a “significant relationship between EE and improvements in customer satisfaction, productivity, profits, turnover and safety records” (Nienaber and Martins, 2016: 7). According to Shuck and Wollard (2010: 99), the article by

Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) indicated that “organisational culture should be measured at the individual level by looking at separate business units, separate unit managers and separate unit employees”. Harter, Schmidt and Hayes’ (2002) article is therefore regarded as “a catalyst for the rapid expansion of interest in the EE concept because it was the first widely disseminated publication to suggest an employee engagement-profit linkage” (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 100). In a later study, Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2003) refer to the GWA as a “measure of a range of elements which together can be called employee engagement”. They define EE as “a combination of cognitive and emotional antecedent variables in the workplace”. This excludes Kahn’s (1990) behavioural element reflected in the physical engagement component (Welch, 2011: 332).

2.2.5.2.4 Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002)

Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) built on the work done by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) and provided the most widely used form of engagement: *work engagement*. They tested Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter’s (2001) engagement framework but changed the definition slightly and created a scale purposively aimed at measuring engagement. Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) referred to engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption” (cited in Osam 2018: 35). This definition lacks the cognitive element of the EE definition (Shuck *et al.* 2017, cited in Osam 2018: 36). Therefore, work engagement only focuses on the emotional and physical elements associated with burnout. Vigour involves elevated levels of energy and mental resilience while working; dedication refers to being intensely involved in one’s work and feeling a sense of significance, enthusiasm and challenge; and absorption means being fully concentrated and absorbed in one’s work (Saks and Gruman 2014: 158). Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) described engagement as “a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour” and not a momentary and specific state (Saks and Gruman 2014: 158). Therefore, “engaged employees have high levels of energy and are enthusiastic about their work” and “are often fully immersed in their work so that time flies”

(Bakker and Demerouti 2008, cited in Saks and Gruman 2014: 158). This perspective is regarded as an alternative to Maslach *et al.* (2001) as it considers engagement to be a distinct concept that is negatively related to burnout (Nienaber and Martins, 2016: 6). In other words, they disagreed with Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter's (2001) concept of engagement as the positive antithesis to burnout (Kunte and Rungruang 2018: 439). The study, therefore, rejected Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter's (2001) view that engagement can be measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and that it should be measured independently using different instruments. It therefore proposed the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) for measuring work engagement (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 6). Schaufeli *et al.*'s. (2002) study clearly described burnout and engagement as independent states operationalised with two different scales (UWES and MBI) (Kunte and Rungruang, 2018: 439).

2.2.5.2.5 Luthans and Peterson (2002)

Luthans and Peterson's (2002) empirical academic study provided confirmation of a conceptual fit between Gallup's GWA (Buckingham and Coffman 1999) and Kahn's (1990) theoretical dimensions of engagement by using Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement. Luthans and Peterson (2002) argued that this established a theoretical grounding for a better understanding of EE "and a way to operationalise it and measure it through the GWA" (Welch 2011: 333).

2.2.5.2.6 May, Gilson and Harter (2004)

The study by May, Gilson and Harter (2004) is significant in that it was the first to empirically test and validate Kahn's (1990) findings. The results of their study showed that meaningfulness, safety and availability were "important in determining one's engagement at work" (May, Gilson and Harter 2004: 30, cited in Shuck and Wollard 2010: 99). According to Shuck and Wollard (2010), May, Gilson and Harter's (2004) findings suggest that Kahn's (1990) framework used in his conceptualisation of engagement provided the foundation on which to build the construct. Shuck and

Wollard (2010) confirm that “many contemporary conceptualisations of engagement build from Kahn’s (1990) and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter’s. (2001) original works”. They also found that job enrichment and role fit predicted meaningfulness; supportive supervisor relations and rewards predicted safety; whereas available resources predicted availability (Dagher, Chapa and Junaid 2015: 237-238). While Schaufeli *et al.*’s. (2002) study focused on job engagement, May, Gilson and Harter’s (2004) study focused on work and EE (Welch, 2011: 330).

Both these studies grew out of the research done by the Utrecht Group. Although they drew on the theoretical model of Kahn (1990), Schaufeli *et al.*, (2002) and May, Gilson and Harter’s (2004) concept of engagement differed significantly “with regard to its nature and role as a positive psychological state”. Kahn (1990) saw engagement as a “qualitative, behavioural and transitory experience that followed the ‘ebbs and flows of daily activities’, the Utrecht Group saw engagement as a more stable and long-lasting attitudinal frame of mind that could be assessed through quantitative methods” (Bailey *et al.*, 2017: 35). This reflected a paradigm shift within the management discipline towards the ‘psychologisation’ of the employment relationship (Godard 2014, in Bailey *et al.*, 2017: 35). Therefore, studies by Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) and May, Gilson and Harter (2004) arose from the positive psychology movement that changed the focus from negative consequences of attitudes to work such as burnout, to positive drivers like engagement (Welch 2011: 333; Nienaber and Martins 2016: 1).

2.2.5.2.7 Hewitt Associates LLC (2004)

Hewitt Associates LLC (2004, cited in Welch 2011: 332) used an 18-item scale to evaluate EE, which they defined as “the state in which individuals are emotionally and intellectually committed to the organisation or group, as measured by three basic behaviours: Say [...], stay [...], and strive.” Hewitt Associates emphasise the importance of EE in corporate performance, emphasizing the necessity to devote resources to increase EE and “motivate talent to continuously excel” (2004: 2, cited

in Welch 2011: 333). This perspective on engagement emphasizes behaviour and appears to be like Kahn's (1990) physical dimension of engagement.

2.2.5.2.8 Schaufeli and Bakker (2004)

Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) stated that the concept of EE arose from research on burnout and became a general response to the increasing popularity of the positive psychology movement which emphasised human strengths and optimal functioning as opposed to weaknesses and malfunctioning (Shoko 201: 14). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) tested the work of previous researchers such as Maslach and Leiter (1997); Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker (2002) who proposed that the conceptual opposites of emotional exhaustion and cynicism (the core dimensions of burnout) are vigour and dedication (the core dimensions of engagement) (Dagher, Chapa and Junaid 2015: 238). Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) used the term job engagement and defined it as “positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption (Welch, 2011: 330; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). While Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement was still influential during this period, Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) definition became just as influential and together with Kahn's (1990) definition became the most frequently cited because they both “share a common focus on the manifestations of engagement: cognitive – absorption; emotional – dedication; and physical – vigour” (Welch 2011:333). According to Nienaber and Martins (2016: 6), Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) developed and validated the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) which is used as the “preferred measurement based on extensive empirical research studies that have shown its psychometric properties to assess engagement”. The UWES relied on “a self-report questionnaire that captures the vigour (energy), enthusiasm (dedication) and involvement (absorption) that are regarded as central features of the employee engagement construct”. The “UWES refers to work engagement rather than personal engagement and suggests that engaged employees are likely to perform better than disengaged employees” (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 6).

2.2.5.3 Period Three: Development of the main employee engagement trends from 2006-2010

Period three saw a surge of academic interest in engagement which peaks with the publication of two EE handbooks in 2010 (Albrecht; Schaufeli and Bakker). Key studies and research are outlined in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5: Development of the main employee engagement trends-period three

PERIOD	AUTHOR	ENGAGEMENT CONCEPT	SUMMARY
PERIOD 3 (2006-2010)	Saks (2006)	Employee Engagement; Job Engagement; Organisation Engagement	Engagement is a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural features (Drivers of engagement). The first academic research to test the antecedents and consequences of EE. Bridged the gap between previous early theories of EE, practitioner literature and the academic community.
	Macey and Schneider (2008)	Employee Engagement	Tri-dimensional framework proposing that EE develops from (a) trait (conscientiousness, proactive personality), (b) state (satisfaction, involvement, commitment) and (c) behavioural (extra-role behaviour, proactivity) engagement. The most significant aspect of their study was that in their conceptual model, “the preceding state of engagement builds on the next, each developing a piece of the overall engagement concept”
	Schaufeli and Bakker (2010)	Work Engagement	“...the psychological state that accompanies the behavioural investment of personal energy”. Position work engagement as a mediating variable in their job demands and resources model of work motivation and engagement.
	Albrecht (2010)	Employee Engagement	EE is “...a positive work-related psychological state characterised by a genuine willingness to contribute to organisational success.”

2.2.5.3.1 Saks (2006)

One of the most significant studies during this period was the publication by Saks (2006) titled *Antecedents and Consequences of Employee Engagement*. Extensive review of the literature reveals that Saks (2006) was the first academic research to test the antecedents and consequences of EE (Shuck and Wollard, 2010; Welch 2011; Nienaber and Martins 2016). Shuck and Wollard (2010) suggest that before Saks (2006), the only body of work that connected EE drivers to EE consequences was found in practitioner research. According to Osam (2018: 34), Saks (2006) defined organisational engagement as “the extent to which an individual is psychologically present in a particular organisational role”. Saks (2006) identified three distinct drivers of EE: cognitive, emotional and behavioural. He believed that EE developed through the Social Exchange Model. Saks (2006) was the first researcher to separate job engagement (performing the work role) and organisational engagement (performing the role as a member of the organisation) into two distinct types of EE (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 100). Saks therefore suggested EE can have multiple focal points, like OC. (Nienaber and Martins, 2016:7). According to Saks (2006), EE is a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural features. Saks’ (2006) definition of engagement included previous literature on EE, bringing forward the idea that EE was developed by cognitive (Kahn, 1990; Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter 2001; Maslow, 1970), emotional (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002; Kahn, 1990) and behavioural (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002; Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter 2001) features.

Since Saks’ (2006) study, other studies that have used Saks’ conception of engagement, revealed that it shares two of the four key features of EE: an active pull and the state-based nature of EE (Shuck *et al.*, 2017 cited in Osam, 2018: 34). Additionally, Shuck *et al.* (2017, cited in Osam, 2018: 34) highlighted “that organisational engagement focuses only on an employee’s psychological presence within an organisation, thus making it a narrower view of EE”. Saks (2006) research however, bridged the gap between previous early theories of EE, practitioner

literature and the academic community. It was also the first type of research to propose an empirical model for EE (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 100). Welch (2011) states that Saks' (2006) research was at the forefront of EE work between 2006 and 2010. Saks (2006) stated that Kahn (1990) and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) provided the two earliest theoretical frameworks for understanding EE (Dagher, Chapa and Junaid 2015; Shuck and Wollard 2010). In addition, Saks (2006) extended the concept of EE to include both job engagement and organisational engagement (Welch 2011: 333).

Therefore, the significance of Saks's work is that it addresses the question of the status of the concept. He was able to address fears that the EE concept was merely a buzzword and not a serious construct by providing a convincing argument that EE is a scientific concept. This removed any hindrances to scholarly work. According to Welch 2011: 334, "His endorsement of the construct and recognition of the surprising dearth of academic work on it, inspired subsequent scientific endeavours". Saks's (2006) work signified the beginning of extensive academic research on EE.

2.2.5.3.2 Macey and Schneider (2008)

Welch (2011) indicated that scientific interest in EE increased toward the end of the decade, particularly with the publication in 2008 of a special edition of a new scientific journal debating the concept of EE (Macey and Schneider 2008a; Saks 2008). Welch (2011) goes on to state that several literature reviews were conducted during this period from various disciplines in the social sciences (Kular *et al.*, 2008; Shuck and Wollard 2010; Attridge 2009). Macey and Schneider (2008) pioneered conceptual research in EE, building significantly on the work of various researchers such as Hackman and Oldham (1980), Kahn (1990), Buckingham and Coffman (1999), Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002), May, Gilson and Harter (2004), Wellins and Concelman (2005), Gonzalez-Roma, Schaufeli, Bakker and Lloret (2006), Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006) amongst others. Nienaber and Martins (2016: 7) describe Macey and Schneider's framework as tri-dimensional in that they proposed that EE develops from the

following three concepts: (a) trait (conscientiousness, proactive personality), (b) state (satisfaction, involvement, commitment) and (c) behavioural (extra-role behaviour, proactivity) engagement. Similarly, to Saks (2006) they “drew significant parallels from prior research and defined each as a separate engagement construct” (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 101). From Macey and Schneider’s (2008) perspective, EE is “defined by suggesting (a) job design attributes ... directly affect trait engagement, (b) the presence of a transformational leader ... directly affect(s) state engagement, and (c) the presence of a transformational leader ... directly affect(s) trust levels and thus, indirectly affect(s) behavioural engagement” (Macey and Schneider 2008, cited in Shuck and Wollard 2010: 101). The most significant aspect of their study was that in their conceptual model, “the preceding state of engagement builds on the next, each developing a piece of the overall engagement concept” (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 101). This study helped to bring into focus the conceptual state of EE and cleared the “cluttered, scattered and unfocused” nature of the concept by dividing the construct into distinct parts and “debunking the ‘folk’ definitions of engagement” (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 101). Macey and Schneider’s (2008) research presents engagement “as a complex concept related to, but distinguishable from, other well-established constructs in academic literature” (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 7).

2.2.5.3.3 Bakker and Leiter (2010) and Albrecht (2010)

The third period reached a peak in 2010 with the publication of two engagement handbooks that provided a wide range of contributions on work engagement, namely: *Engagement: A Handbook of Essential Theory and Research* (Bakker and Leiter 2010) and on EE. *Handbook of Employee Engagement: Perspectives, Issues Research and Practice* (Albrecht 2010). These contributions came from psychology, business, and management academics as well as practitioners (Welch 2011: 334). Kahn (2010) also contributed a chapter in Albrecht’s handbook on the essence of engagement, in which he summarises and discusses lessons learned from his 30-year experience in the engagement field. He emphasises the concept’s extensive appeal and contrasts its intuitive nature with its complexity. Referring to his earlier

work, Kahn (1990) described the concept of engagement as when “employees offer up different degrees and dimensions of their selves according to some internal calculus that they consciously and unconsciously make” (Welch 2011: 334). He compares this dynamic concept with the classic steady-state motivation theory, which categorises employees as motivated or unmotivated. Kahn also reaffirmed the three determinants of engagement: meaningfulness, safety, and availability. His approach emphasises the fact that engagement is fluid and changeable (Welch 2011: 334-335)

Research studies until this point confirmed that “employee engagement can be understood as cognitive, emotional and physical role performance characterised by absorption, dedication and vigour and dependent upon the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability” (Welch, 2011: 335).

2.2.5.4 Period Four: Development of the main employee engagement trends from 2010 Onwards

Table 2.6: Development of the main employee engagement trends-period four

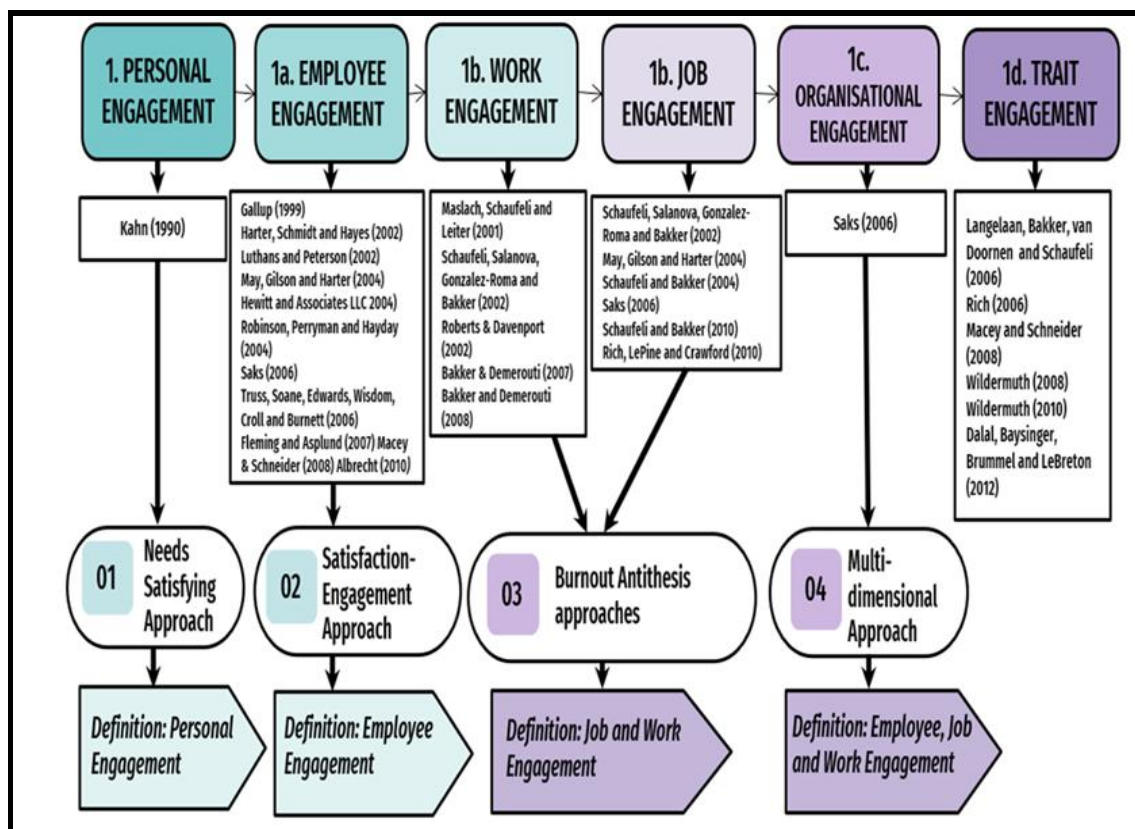
PERIOD	AUTHOR	ENGAGEMENT CONCEPT	SUMMARY
PERIOD 4 (2010 ONWARDS)	Shuck and Wollard (2010)	Employee Engagement	Extensive review of EE research-engagement is “a cognitive, emotional, and behavioural state directed toward desired organisational outcomes”.
	Christian <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Work Engagement	Extensive quantitative review and test of work engagement and its relations with task and contextual performance. Identified an agreed upon definition of engagement, investigated its uniqueness and clarified its nomological network of constructs.
	Bakker (2011); Schaufeli (2012)	Work Engagement	Outlined directions for future research in EE.
	Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter (2011); Cole, Walter, Bedeian and O’Boyle (2012)	Work Engagement; Job burnout/Employee Engagement	reflected “confusion, disagreement and a lack of consensus around the meaning and distinctiveness of EE amongst scholars and practitioners”.
	Shuck <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Employee Engagement	highlighted the problem of a “conceptual overlap” between EE and other “established constructs such as job satisfaction, OC and job involvement”. See also Cole et al (2012)
	Lavigna (2013); Truss <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Employee Engagement	Academics and practitioners have struggled to “develop a universal definition of engagement, establish a common set of antecedents and consequences, and agree on a [single] measurement tool to assess engagement”
	Guest (2013)	Employee Engagement	referred to EE as a “catch-all” phrase used “to describe a range of work-related attitudes, including job satisfaction, alongside perceptions of various organisational behaviours, such as leadership, employee voice and involvement”

After 2010, the evolution of studies relating to engagement took the form of reviews, validation studies, studies on antecedents and job crafting. Extensive reviews were conducted (Shuck and Wollard 2010; Christian, Garza and Slaughter 2011), while studies by Bakker (2011) and Schaufeli (2012) outlined the directions for future research (Kunte and Rungruang 2018: 442). Lo (2018: 19-20) stated that research during this period (Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter 2011; Cole, Walter, Bedeian and O'Boyle 2012) also reflected "confusion, disagreement and a lack of consensus around the meaning and distinctiveness of EE amongst scholars and practitioners". Academics and practitioners have struggled to "develop a universal definition of engagement, establish a common set of antecedents and consequences, and agree on a [single] measurement tool to assess engagement" (Lavigna 2013; Truss, Delbridge, Alfes, Shantz and Soane 2013, cited in Harris 2018: 35). Studies by Cole *et al.* (2012); Shuck *et al.* (2012) highlighted the problem of a "conceptual overlap" between EE and other "established constructs such as job satisfaction, OC and job involvement" (Lo, 2018: 19).

New definitions were being developed based on the results of previous studies. Guest (2013) referred to EE as a "catch-all" phrase used "to describe a range of work-related attitudes, including job satisfaction, alongside perceptions of various organisational behaviours, such as leadership, employee voice and involvement" (Lo 2018: 20). Guest (2013) subsequently questioned whether engagement lacked construct validity (Lo 2018: 20). Although there is some confusion over the general concept of EE, it is accepted that EE ultimately demonstrates "strong connections between organisations and individuals, which leads to positive and rewarding consequences for both" (Harris 2018: 35-36). According to Schaufeli (2014 cited in Harris 2018: 36), "...engagement is easy to recognise in practice. However, it is very difficult to define". As evidenced in the discussion above, both academics and practitioners have examined and addressed EE extensively (Lai, Tang, Lu, Lee and Lin 2020; Mone and London 2018; Saks and Gruman 2014). Employees are an essential part of every organisation's human capital and keeping them on board is difficult in the modern workplace, which is marked by significant absenteeism and employee turnover (Reijseger, Peeters, Taris and Schaufeli 2017). Employee

engagement is crucial and critical because, according to previous research, it increases performance (Bakker and Albrecht 2018), productivity, OCB, and satisfaction among employees. The above trends can therefore be grouped into various approaches as discussed earlier which have defined research within the field of engagement. This is reflected in Figure 2.1, which draws everything together for a more streamlined understanding of the perspectives and trends within EE.

Figure 2.1: Critical approaches to employee engagement



Source: Self-generated

2.2.6 Employee engagement in the age of millennials

Additionally, studies on EE in relation to other nations have been conducted, including those in Greece and Spain (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002), Japan (Shimazu and Schaufeli 2009), and India (Anitha 2014). According to the literature, Biswas and

Bhatnagar (2013, cited in Sahni 2021), boosting organisational performance and producing satisfied workers depends heavily on the utility of EE. An organisation's and a nation's performance may suffer because of disengaged workers, according to studies carried out worldwide.

For instance, a study carried out in the United States of America revealed that around half of the workforce was found to be disengaged, resulting in decreased production and financial loss to the nation (Kelleher 2011, cited in Sahni 2021). Hooper (2006, cited in Sahni 2021) conducted an additional study in Australia that indicates the substantial cost of disengaged workers to the economy (US\$31 billion (about \$95 per person in the US)). Therefore, using interventions to increase EE is essential for businesses and nations to experience consistent economic growth. It is therefore crucial to engage workers from all generations and backgrounds, but retaining and engaging millennials is the most difficult challenge. Considering that millennials are flooding the job market at present, including HEIs; a review of the literature indicates limited research on the engagement of millennials in the workplace more especially in higher education, indicating a definite gap in research.

According to Jha, Sareen and Potnuru (2019), Millennials or Generation Y refers to people born between the early 1980s, through the mid-1990s until the early 2000s - more specifically, it includes people born between 1981 and 1996. These employees are between the ages of 27 and 42. Because they were born and raised with smart technologies, this generation is often referred to as the "iGen" and "tech-savvy" generation. They have strong self-esteem, high aspirations, and an unwillingness to put their all into anything they see as being unimportant to their job (Schullery 2013, cited in Jha, Sareen and Potnuru 2019). The greatest number of economic crises and environmental disturbances have been experienced by millennials. As a result, they have become risk-averse, overly concerned with their own personal growth, and unwilling to devote their entire attention to a single task. Therefore, millennials search for employment opportunities that enable them to hold many positions. For this generation, advancing one's own interests comes first. They have an elevated level of ambition, expect rapid growth, and despise restrictive organisational

structures and information silos that restrict their freedom (Jha, Sareen and Potnuru 2019). In other words, they desire an immediate return on their investment. Millennials place a lot more emphasis on juggling work with their personal aspirations and passions than earlier generations did. To advance their careers, meet new people, and give back to the community, they constantly look for new employment opportunities. They anticipate that their bosses will push them but not micromanage them. They are looking for a flexible atmosphere with lots of opportunity to advance their careers. When compared to older, more experienced workers, millennials have different expectations, making it difficult for managers to fully comprehend what motivates them (Meola 2016, cited in Sahni 2021). This generation is changing the employer-employee relationship thanks to their propensity for working in groups, excellent multitasking skills, and potential to transform the workplace (Swan 2016, cited in Sahni 2021). However, millennials have a lower threshold for high-stress jobs, which could result in lower levels of job engagement and satisfaction. Additionally, this discontent frequently leads millennials to quit their jobs and switch organisations (Abate 2016, cited in Sahni 2021).

It is always advisable to communicate with your workforce before launching any EE programme to fully grasp and comprehend their opinions and perspectives. It would be foolish to generalise about any group, but numerous studies have revealed that the generation known as 'millennials' holds more liberal social views than previous generations and supports more classical liberal economic policies overall (Cattermole, 2018: 290). For instance, they are more likely to support same-sex marriage and the legalisation of drugs than previous generations have. Their hopes and aspirations are significantly more slanted towards being famous" than those of any previous generation because they have grown up with such a strong celebrity and cultural influence. The traditional stages of entering adulthood have taken longer than they did for other generational groups like 'baby boomers' and Generation X'. Many millennials do not begin their careers until they are in their early 20s, and because of the high cost of living and university tuition, they cannot begin to climb the housing ladder until they are in their 30s, so they spend a longer period living at home with their parents than ever before (Cattermole 2018: 292).

Baby boomers have always placed a strong priority on loyalty, work ethic, and a consistent professional path, while employees from Generation X began to prioritise stability, work-life balance, personal growth, and job satisfaction. However, millennials seek meaningful employment, place an increasing emphasis on work-life balance, yearn for a creative outlet, and demand quick feedback (Cattermole 2018: 293). To achieve their own personal fulfilment rather than monetary objectives, they are also happy to change occupations and professional paths and to be more dynamic in their career growth. For millennials, salary and benefits are expected. Millennials want more than just a job; they want to feel like they are making a difference in the world, contributing to society, and working for a firm that fosters a positive work environment. Since millennials have grown up in a society of abundance and have had their fundamental needs met, they naturally focus on achieving what Maslow called "their higher needs". Maslow suggests that these are esteem (significance, recognition, and respect) and love/belonging (social, love, family, and team (Cattermole 2018: 294).

2.2.7 Measurement of employee engagement

As mentioned in an earlier discussion, numerous instruments have been developed to measure EE and there remain ongoing questions about the best way to measure the concept, including the validity of these measures. A review of certain literature (Saks and Gruman 2014; Shrotryia and Dhanda 2019; Hayden 2019) revealed 12 different scales 'claiming' to measure EE (see Table 2.7). It should however be noted that some of these scales have seldom been used and where they have been used, it has been in only one study (Saks and Gruman 2014: 164). In addition, Saks and Gruman (2014: 163) intentionally excluded one of the scales, namely, the Gallup engagement survey (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002), because it measures management practices and not engagement. A study by Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019) conducted a systematic literature review of EE measurement instruments. The objectives of the study were (1) to identify the major instruments available for measuring EE, (2) to determine the psychometric properties of these instruments

and (3) to determine how these instruments can be assessed. Ten measurement instruments for EE were selected and assessed based on the citations and usage by scholars and practitioners using 1990 as the base year and ending in 2016. The first five instruments had more than 2000 citations on Google Scholar and were therefore selected for assessment. These included three instruments with the highest number of citations on the Google Scholar database namely, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker 2002) with 7126 citations, the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002) with 4878 citations, and the job and organisational engagement scale by Saks (2006) with 4202 citations. Instruments with extremely low citations such as the Employee Engagement Scale by Thomas (2007), were discarded from the study. Additionally, the next five instruments for the study were selected based on the testing of the instruments on a large population sample and acknowledged for their robustness. These included the global engagement survey by Blessing White (2011) conducted on 10914 employees across North America, India, Europe, Southeast Asia, Australia, etc and the Employee Engagement Scale by Shuck, Adelson and Reio Jr (2016), conducted on various sample populations in the healthcare, finance and education sectors, etc.

The literature, nevertheless, revealed the following measurement scales for EE, eight of which were referred to more than once across the three references identified above (Saks and Gruman 2014; Shrotryia and Dhanda 2019; Hayden 2019). The GWA (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes 2002); the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002); the Work and Family Engagement Scale (Rothbard, 2001); the Job and Organisational Engagement Scale (Saks 2006); the Job Engagement Measure/Scale (Rich Le Pine and Crawford 2010); the Psychological Engagement Measure (May, Gilson and Harter 2004); the Intellectual, Social, Affective Engagement Scale (Soane *et al.*, 2012); the Global Engagement Survey (Blessing White 2011); the Employee Engagement Measure (Pati 2012); the Employee Engagement Scale (EES) (Shuck *et al.*, 2017); the Employee Engagement Survey (James, McKechnie, and Swanberg 2011), and the Felt and Behavioural Engagement Scale (Stumpf, Tymon and van Dam 2013). Regarding

studies conducted within the higher education sector (Theron 2022; Barkhuizen and Rothmann 2006; Barkhuizen, Mogwere and Schutte 2014; Borst, Kruijnen and Lako 2019; Byrne and MacDonagh 2017; Coetzee and Rothmann 2005; Diedricks, Cilliers and Bezuidenhout 2019; Hakeem and Gulzar 2015), the predominant focus has been on job or work engagement and the most popular instrument used was the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES).

Table 2.7: Measurement of employee engagement

NAME OF THE INSTRUMENT	AUTHORS	YEAR OF PUBLICATION	SOURCES
The Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA)	Harter, Schmidt and Hayes	2002	Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019)
The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES)	Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma and Bakker	2002	Saks and Gruman (2014); Hayden, (2019); Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019)
The Work and Family Engagement Scale	Rothbard	2001	Saks and Gruman (2014); Hayden, (2019)
The Job and Organisational Engagement Scale	Saks	2006	Saks and Gruman (2014); Hayden, (2019); Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019)
The Job Engagement Measure	Rich, LePine and Crawford	2010	Saks and Gruman (2014); Hayden, (2019); Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019)
The Psychological Engagement Measure	May, Gilson and Harter	2004	Saks and Gruman (2014); Hayden, (2019); Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019)
The Intellectual, Social, Affective Engagement Scale	Soane, Truss, Alfes, Shantz, Rees and Gatenby	2012	Saks and Gruman (2014); Hayden, (2019); Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019)
The Global Engagement Scale	Blessing White	2011	Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019)
The Employee Engagement Measure	Pati	2011	Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019)
The Employee Engagement Scale (EES)	Shuck, Adelson and Reio	2017	Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019); Hayden, (2019)
The Employee Engagement Survey	James, McKechnie and Swanberg	2010	Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019)
The Felt and Behavioural Engagement Scale	Stumpf, Tymon and van Dam	2013	Saks and Gruman (2014); Hayden, (2019)

Source: Shrotryia and Dhanda (2019:28). Adapted.

2.2.8 Literature relating to strategic, operational and individual best-practices for employee engagement in the higher education sector

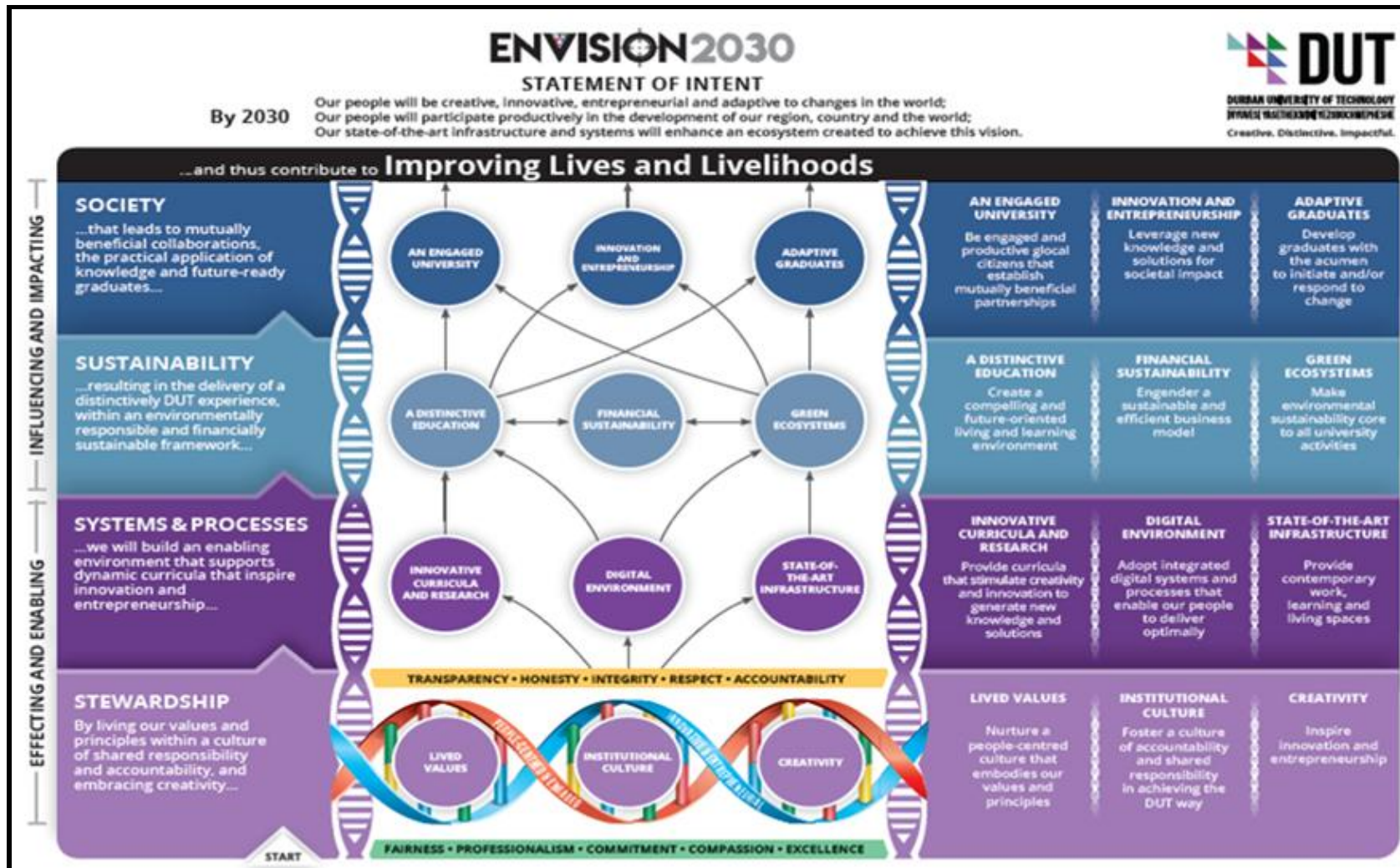
2.2.8.1 Strategic

Due to its role in determining competitiveness, particularly competitive advantage, EE is critical. Competitive advantage today often guarantees improved organisational performance. Because of this, engagement has attracted more attention from academics and practitioners, as shown in the writings of authors like the CIPD, Fearon, McLaughlin and Morris, Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, and Schaufeli and Salanova. Academic experts in a range of fields, including strategy, strategic HR management, human capital, and talent management, acknowledge that competitive advantage is the distinguishing feature of a comprehensive strategy (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 21).

Pioneers in the field of strategy, including Andrews (1987), Ansoff (1965), and Drucker (1954) argued that strategy is the method that organisations use to accomplish their objectives (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 21). This theory of strategy is supported by modern writers like Nilsson and Ellström (2012), Ployhart, Nyberg, Reilly and Maltarich (2014) (cited in Nienaber and Martins 2016: 21). They all agree, as well, that the CEO oversees and is responsible for strategy. In addition, they all agree that sustainability or long-term survival and growth is the ultimate objective of any organisation. Additionally, they believe achieving goals reflects positively on an organisation's success. According to Nienaber and Martins (2016: 23) many academic and professional researchers such as Aguinis (2013), Mankins and Steele (2005) and Mintzberg (1994) have noted that the CEO can improve the performance of the organisation in this regard. Van der Merwe and Nienaber (2015) found that this observation held true for South African organisations as well. The primary justification advanced for enhancing organisational performance, is the failure to implement strategy due to a shortage of resources, particularly employees with the necessary knowledge and skills, or 'human capital,' Therefore, engagement is a subject that merits attention, particularly from the CEO (Nienaber and Martins, 2016:

24). It is argued that because engagement relates to a work role, it cannot be separated from the organisation, as work is designed to accomplish organisational objectives, and therefore performance. According to Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002); Saks, (2006); Pugh and Dietz, (2008); and Fearon, McLaughlin and Morris (2013), aspects of engagement that cannot be measured by merely aggregating individual or unit measures are included in engagement at the organisational level of measurement (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 24).

Figure 2.2: DUT Envision 2030



Source: DUT Strategic Plan (2019)

In September 2018, the DUT began developing a new strategic path for the institution. This strategy was named 'Envision2030' and it featured the DUT's important strategic goals as well as the vital connections between them that aim to fuel the institution's organisational performance guaranteed by its competitive advantage within the higher education sector. The Envision2030 document presents the "desired strategic destination," describes the "logic and direction," and underlines the "outcomes and impacts" of the DUT's activities (see Figure 2.2). Plans and initiatives at the national and international levels, also with a time frame towards 2030, serve as the foundation for its 2030 horizon. They include the National Development Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, and with a longer time horizon, the Agenda, 2063: The Africa We Want strategy. The slogan of Envision2030 is "Creative, Distinctive, Impactful," which sums up its three defining attributes (DUT 2018).

The DUT's DNA holds the Envision2030 strategy together and consists of two interlinked and paired strands, namely 'people-centred and engaged' and 'innovative and entrepreneurial'. The two 'bridges' that support the two DNA strands are the values, principles, ethos and culture of the university. The five values include (1) transparency, honesty, integrity, respect, and accountability, while the five principles include, (1) fairness, (2) professionalism, (3) commitment, (4) compassion, and (5) excellence. Envision2030 consists of a statement of intent which includes the following three features: (1) "Our people will be entrepreneurial, innovative, creative, and adaptive to change in the world", (2) "Our people will participate productively in the development of our region, country, and the world", and (3) "Our state-of-the-art infrastructure and systems will enhance an ecosystem created to achieve this vision" (DUT 2018).

This statement of intent is underpinned by four perspectives namely, *stewardship, systems and processes, sustainability, and society*. The institution's twelve strategic objectives are organised in relation to these four perspectives. There are three strategic objectives for each perspective. The four perspectives are scaffolded, with

Stewardship at the bottom. Stewardship, along with Systems and Processes, are collectively 'effecting and enabling' perspectives, while Sustainability, the third perspective, and Society, the fourth perspective, are collectively 'influencing and impacting' perspectives.

According to the Envision2030 interpretation guide, Stewardship is the fundamental perspective to the Envision2030 strategy, is located at the centre of the DNA double helix and based on values and principles related to shared responsibility and accountability. The strategic objectives of Stewardship include: (i) Lived Values, (ii) Institutional Culture and (iii) Creativity. The second perspective's foundation, namely Systems and Processes, is the establishment of a supportive environment that has coordinated and interdependent systems and processes across the DUT. The strategic objectives of this perspective include (i) Curricula and Research, (ii) the Digital Environment and (iii) State-of-the-Art Infrastructure. The third perspective namely, Sustainability includes the following strategic objectives: (i) a Distinctive Education, (ii) Financial Sustainability and (iii) Green Ecosystems. This perspective is based on an integrated approach that examines the environment, economic progress and the future of knowledge generation. The fourth and final perspective is Society which is predicated on the following strategic objectives: (i) an engaged University, (ii) Innovation and Entrepreneurship and (iii) Adaptive Graduates. This perspective is based on a dynamic and innovative problem-solving approach that impacts society at both a local and global level (DUT, 2018).

Hence, the four perspectives reflect the strategic intent of the institution, and the twelve strategic objectives reflect the operational flow. These in turn must be linked directly to the goals of each faculty and department within the institution to operationalise the strategy (DUT 2018).

A critical factor to note is that Envision2030 represents a significant departure from typical strategic planning, removing the obsolete approach of establishing a vision and mission statement constrained by a five-year time limit. Envision2030, on the

other hand, adopts a 10-year time horizon and a strategic intent to generate positive outcomes acknowledged not only by the university community but by society as well (DUT 2018). As indicated above, one of the strands in the DUT DNA that holds its strategy together is 'people-centredness and engagement'. Although this includes students, it can be accepted that this new strategy depends on the critical engagement of all DUT staff to guarantee its successful implementation. Factors such as a shortage of resources, especially employees with the necessary knowledge and skills or human capital, are likely to undermine any attempts by the institution to achieve its strategic objectives. In addition, a lack of sufficient human capital and increased expectations with regards to workloads, etcetera, may create unintended conflicts within the workplace thus serving to undermine the entire strategy of the DUT. The institution may also face resistance from staff and unions who may not be willing to adapt to the necessary changes brought about by this new strategy which in turn may lead to further conflicts and the subsequent need for effective and efficient conflict management systems and processes at the institution. Alternatively, a more engaged workforce is likely to result in reduced levels of conflict and more efficient management of conflict at the institution.

Emmott (2015) identified a strong relationship between EE, conflict resolution and a supportive organisational culture. Currie, Gormley, Roche and Teague (2017) assert that one of the most important aspects of conflict management is conflict prevention, and that considering the psychological alignment between employees and their employers, encourages better alignment with the strategic goals, vision, and mission of their organisation. Workplace conflict is therefore seen as inhibiting these goals (Purcell, 2014), and OCB is encouraged (Currie *et al.* 2016). Therefore, EE is a subject that warrants significant attention, especially from the vice-chancellor (CEO) of the institution, confirmed by the active role played by the VC at the DUT in promoting and steering Envision2030 (DUT 2018). Table 2.8 illustrates the links between the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the DUT envision 2030 perspectives and the 12 strategic objectives.

Table 2.8: Comparative table reflecting the links between the United Nations' sustainable development goals and the strategic objectives of DUT's envision2030 strategy

UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS	DUT ENVISION 2030 PERSPECTIVES	DUT ENVISION 2030 12 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES
➤ Goal No.4: Quality Education	➤ Sustainability ➤ Society ➤ Systems and Processes	➤ A Distinctive Education ➤ Adaptive Graduates ➤ Innovative Curricula and Research
➤ Goal No.9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	➤ Society ➤ Systems and Processes ➤ Sustainability ➤ Stewardship	➤ Innovation And Entrepreneurship ➤ Innovative Curricula and Research ➤ Digital Environment ➤ State-Of-The-Art Infrastructure ➤ Financial Sustainability ➤ Creativity
➤ Goal No.13: Climate Action	➤ Sustainability	➤ Green Ecosystems
➤ Goal No.5: Gender Equality ➤ Goal No.16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	➤ Stewardship	➤ Lived Values ➤ Institutional Culture
➤ Goal No.17: Partnerships for Goals	➤ Society	➤ An Engaged University

Source: Self-generated

2.2.8.2 Operational

Because the institution is a network of faculties and departments that frequently function as silos and independent players, implementing a strategy becomes a crucial exercise in coordination at the operational level. Adopting a strategic perspective of the organisation and balancing the relative resource demands with the institution's overarching strategic direction is essential. The implementation of

such decisions at functional levels within the institution, across faculties and departments, represents the next challenge. Using operational and tactical planning gives the institution the resources and knowledge needed to execute implement the strategy, in addition to understanding that the strategic level of planning is the key to transforming an organisation's statement of strategic intent (Hinton 2012: 27). Operational planning is organisational planning that takes place at the department level. In institutions where planning is not integrated, operational planning usually entails divisions and departments developing their own strategic objectives and, with them, a list of valuable resource requirements. This process is informed by the institution's overall strategy used to allocate resources according to priority (Hinton, 2012: 28). Organisations thus provide formal frameworks for directing people's collective efforts on common, defined goals, which represent a long-term state that, if attained, would contribute to fulfilling the organisation's purpose as represented in its strategic intent (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 24).

Additionally, line managers, the link between the organisation and its people, enhance goal achievement. Line managers, by virtue of their position in the company, play a critical role in goal achievement and hence engagement. Interactions between line managers and individual employees are crucial and must be consistent with the organisation's values, as noted by academic and practitioner researchers such as CIPD (2014a), Fearon, McLaughlin and Morris (2013), and Ployhart, Nyberg, Reilly and Maltarich (2014), to sustain engagement (as cited in Nienaber and Martins 2016: 25). According to the CIPD (2014a) and Shantz and Alfes (2015), the line manager has a direct impact on a variety of issues that empower or frustrate workers in carrying out their task to meet organisational goals. As a result, line managers must be mindful of how they treat employees, particularly with fairness and respect; provide autonomy to employees; pay attention to the quality of communication with employees, including clarifying expectations; and attend to teamwork and employee learning and development to ensure that employees are empowered rather than controlled, in order to perform their duties in striving to achieve organisational goals. Employees will feel appreciated and respected if this is done, which will be reinforced

by line managers who aggressively seek and implement their employees' recommendations, demonstrating that their perspectives matter and make a difference. Similarly, behaviour that is congruent with the organisation's declared ideals fosters trust and a sense of integrity. In this way, the line manager indicates that he or she is a devoted human agent, increasing the chance of encouraging favourable reciprocal exchanges from staff. As a result, the CIPD (2014) recommends that senior management capitalise on the valuable contributions of line managers rather than ignoring them (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 25).

Engagement at organisational level recognises that employees play a role as organisational members and hence within the context of the organisation. Engagement at the organisational level tries to account for the dynamics at that level. Furthermore, meaningfulness (Kahn 1990) and significance (Schaufeli *et al.* 2002) are related to employees' views and experiences of whether they contribute to the organisation's mission in performing their jobs. Interactions among organisational members shape their work experiences and perceptions, which shape their attitudes and conduct. As a result, these encounters should be consistent with organisational values, which creates trust. The line manager is crucial in influencing an individual employee's decision to engage or disengage (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 26).

The four perspectives of the DUT's strategy are defined as (1) Stewardship, which refers to a "values- and principles-based collective responsibility and accountability, as custodians for all that is DUT namely, (its) people, (its) infrastructure, resources and the environment", (2) Systems and Processes which entails "providing an enabling environment with co-ordinated and interdependent systems and processes across the institution", (3) Sustainability which reflects "an integrated approach that considers how the DUT ensures the future of knowledge production, the environment and economic progress", and (4) Society which represents "a dynamic and solutions-focused interaction with, and impact on, society and at both local and global levels" (DUT 2018).

The four perspectives of the DUT strategy map are strategically scaffolded to produce multidisciplinary and interconnected pathways towards an envisaged goal of improving lives and livelihoods, manifested in a university engaged in a dynamic and impactful relationship with society at large, marked by an innovative and entrepreneurial spirit, and the production of graduates who are creative and innovative, as well as demonstrating a capacity for entrepreneurship. The achievement of these aims requires that the DUT embarks on a systematic journey towards 2030 that sees its focus progressively shifting from the embedding of values and attitudes and the alignment and efficiency of systems and processes towards greater long-term goals of social, financial and environmental sustainability and meaningful and transformative effect on society (DUT 2018).

A critical perspective underlying the entire strategy is that of Stewardship which sits at the core of the DUT's DNA. It acknowledges that people are the centre of everything that happens anywhere and everywhere in the world. Within this is the institution's living values framework reflecting five critical values (transparency, integrity, honesty, accountability and respect) and five critical principles (fairness, professionalism, compassion, commitment and excellence). The framework guides the actions of all stakeholders within the institution, including staff and managers. Within the framework are also five pillars namely, (1) 'We' referring to what's expected of everyone within DUT, (2) 'I', what's expected of a student at the DUT, (3) 'I', what's expected of staff at the DUT, (4) 'I', what's expected of managers and leaders at the DUT, and (5) 'We', what's expected of structures and committees at the DUT. The aim is to make the framework a living document ensuring the espoused values and principles are embedded in everything done at the DUT. This in turn will support the building of "the DUT way" or institutional culture. Subsequently, this will see changes to various HR practices such as recruitment and selection of people who are fit for purpose and reflect "the DUT way". It also entails infusing elements of the framework into various policies and procedures including the performance management system (DUT 2018).

Various studies have highlighted the role of the aforementioned values and principles in promoting EE (Saks 2006; Kular *et al.* 2008; Markos and Sridevi 2010; Millar 2012; Saks and Gruman 2014; Anitha 2014; Ugwu, Onyishi and Rodriguez-Sanchez 2014; Hough, Green and Plumlee 2015; Farrell 2016; Chandani, Mehta, Mall and Khokar 2016; Jiang and Luo 2018; Nair and Salleh 2018; Edward 2021; Hadziahmetovic and Salihovic 2022; Jiang and Shen 2023). This links to the earlier discussion on the role of line managers in ensuring EE by treating employees with respect, fairness, compassion, amongst others, which in turn contributes towards organisational performance and success.

2.2.8.3 Individual

Employee engagement at the organisational level is driven by organisational antecedents. These preconditions are critical not only for driving engagement and development, but also for attaining the organisation's mission, vision, and goals (Wollard and Shuck 2011, as cited in Harris 2018: 71). Wollard and Shuck, 2011 (cited in Hale 2016 and Harris 2018) identified 13 of 21 organisational antecedents that drive the development of EE and were empirically tested. These included an authentic and supportive corporate culture, clear expectations and feedback, corporate social responsibility, job characteristics, job control, job fit, level of task challenge, manager expectations, manager self-efficacy, employee perceptions of workplace safety, rewards and recognition, organisational mission and vision, job resources and training. According to Hayden (2019), many elements have been identified in the literature as impacting an employee's engagement at work. Job characteristics such as skill variety, task-identity, and autonomy (Hackman and Oldham 1980) provide individuals with the opportunity and desire to bring more of themselves into their work, thereby becoming more engaged (Kahn 1992). Hayden (2019) also identifies external rewards and recognition for a job, in terms of the social exchange theory (SET) (Blau 1964, cited in Hayden 2019), as providing an incentive for employees to become more engaged (Saks, 2006). Additional drivers include affective commitment and supervisor support (Saks 2006, cited in Hayden 2019: 16).

According to Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), engagement drivers are heavily influenced by the work environment that individuals are exposed to, which is more commonly referred to as person-organisation fit. Employees should also be a great job-fit for the task, as this can go a long way towards assuring fulfilment and dedication, especially if the employee is identified to be suited for a certain role (Boon and Biron 2016, cited in Dengana 2021). Engaged employees are more likely to exhibit a variety of behaviours that improve organisational success, such as putting greater effort into their core work functions and frequently going beyond the call of duty.

Shoko (2014) cites different authors as identifying the following factors influencing EE at work: relationships in the workplace, two-way communication, a congruence between organisational and individual values, work-life balance (Heikkeri 2010), and a fit between the person and the work environment (Christian, Garza and Slaughter 2011). These working circumstances must inspire people to be more motivated, innovative, devoted, and productive. Employees should have access to knowledge, tools, support, and chances to learn and improve to ensure this (Okpu and Jaja 2014). Good and rewarding working connections create a comfortable and respectful environment for workers and increase EE. According to Kahn (1990: 708), interpersonal interactions promote psychological safety if they give support, trust, openness, flexibility, and an absence of threat (Shoko, 2014: 22). An extensive study by Bailey *et al.* (2017) on the meaning, antecedents and outcomes of EE also identified positive antecedents such as job resources, positive psychological states and positive perceptions of leaders and organisations as being significantly associated with higher levels of engagement.

As reflected in the earlier discussion on the DNA of the DUT in its Envision2030 strategy, this DNA, consisting of two strands namely, “people-centredness and engagement,” as well as “innovation and entrepreneurship,” binds the whole strategy together. The double-helix of the DUT’s DNA is in turn held together by its shared values and principles, for example, integrity, honesty, fairness, commitment,

etcetera which are reflected in the “Living Values Framework”. The DNA represents a code at the heart of the institution's uniqueness and informs the development of the university, which is fully aware of its stewardship role in society. It can therefore be concluded that both the strategy and more significantly the DNA and living values framework of the DUT would be critical in creating some of the above antecedents to EE at the institution, for example, authenticity of corporate culture, job-fit, manager expectations, rewards and recognition, supportive organisational culture and work environment, relationships in the workplace, person-organisation fit, amongst others (DUT 2018).

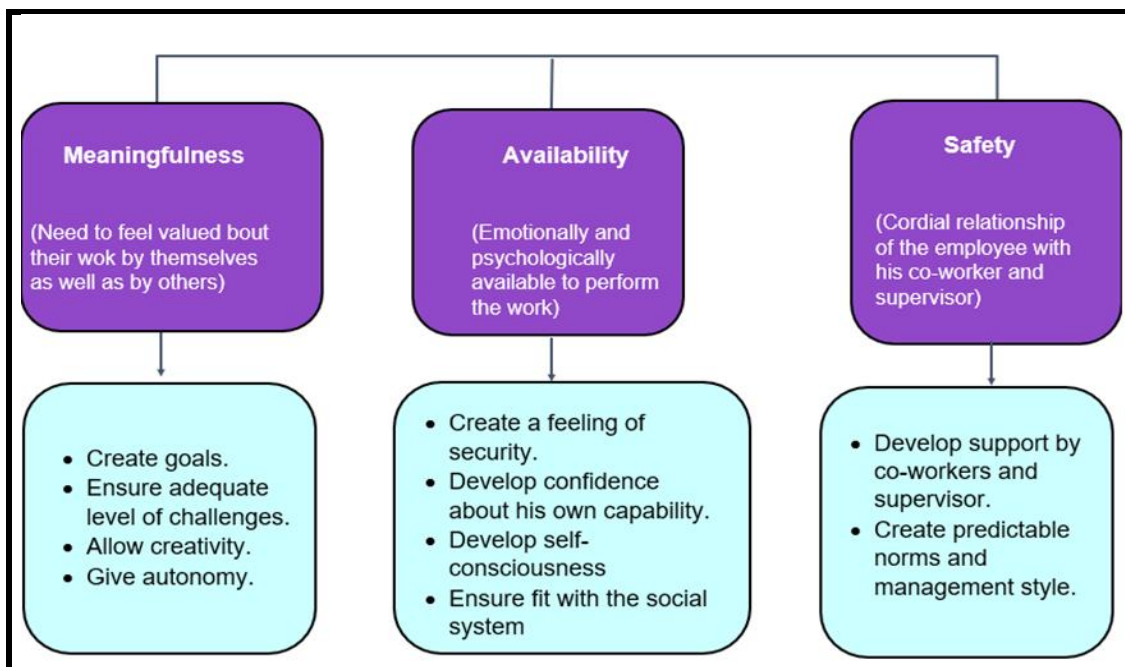
2.2.9 Theoretical framework underpinning employee engagement

Numerous studies have tried to combine the several attributes of engagement into workable models. In this research, five engagement models will be explained but only two will be selected to carry out the study. According to Saks and Gruman (2014), the various models and theories of engagement originate from two primary areas of research: (1) Kahn's (1990) ethnographic study on personal engagement and disengagement and (2) Job burnout and employee well-being (Maslach and Leiter 1997). Shoko (2014) also indicates that Saks (2006) provided an alternative approach to engagement underpinned by the SET of Homans (1958). Saks (2006) developed and tested his own model of EE. Employee Engagement models help understand the variables influencing EE and allow researchers to predict and identify the consequences of engagement. The discussion below provides a basic explanation of EE in respect of the different models or theories. Four critical areas pertaining to each model have been addressed: (1) a basic description and the key features of the model, (2) further research and expansion of the model, (3) application of the model in a higher education context, and (4) limitations and shortcomings of the model.

2.2.9.1 Kahn's Tripartite Employee Engagement Model (Strategic)

Kahn's tripartite employee engagement model was the first theory of engagement. Bailey, Madden, Alfes and Fletcher's (2017) article identified seven (7) studies that referred to Kahn's (1990) model of engagement. Bailey *et al.* (2017) said that Kahn's model draws on the job characteristics theory of Hackman and Oldham (1976). Kahn's (1990) study showed that some aspects of work design such as autonomy, feedback and task significance will generate the psychological conditions necessary for engagement.

Figure 2.3: Kahn's model of employee engagement



Source: Padhi, Panda and Kumar (2015: 80)

Kahn's (1990) study involved interviews with summer camp counsellors and employees from an architecture firm about their moments of engagement and disengagement at work. Kahn's model (see Figure 2.3) is based on three psychological conditions related to engagement or disengagement at work: Meaningfulness, Safety, and Availability. He found that workers were more engaged

at work in situations that offered them more psychological meaningfulness and psychological safety, and when they were more psychologically available. (Kular *et al.* 2008; Saks and Gruman 2014). He also argued that individuals ask themselves questions about these three conditions when making decisions about the extent to which they will engage themselves in a role (Saks and Gruman 2014). Specifically, Kahn (1990) argues that a state of meaningfulness is a scenario where workers feel worthwhile, valuable, and useful and appreciated for the work they do. Workplaces that offer incentives for investing oneself in one's role are more likely to lead to psychological meaningfulness (Kahn 1990). Psychological safety exists in scenarios where workers possess the conviction that they are not going to suffer because of engaging in their work. Social systems that are predictable, consistent, and non-threatening provide an increased sense of psychological safety (Kahn 1990, cited in Saks and Gruman 2014). Kahn (1990) defines availability as a belief that one has the personal psychological, emotional and physical means required to invest oneself in the performance of a role. Employees are therefore more engaged in workplaces that provide them with physical, emotional and psychological resources needed for role performance.

This model is cognisant of the fact that individual coping strategies in life outside the job can have an impact on one's engagement to a particular job. Kahn's (1990) investigations also conclude that most people have personal preferred views of themselves that they use and express during role performance. Employees engage with the job if they can match the existing psychological conditions at their workplace with their actions and work roles (Wilson 2009). In the only study to empirically test Kahn's (1990) model, May, Gilson, and Harter (2004) found that meaningfulness, safety, and availability are significantly related to engagement. Overall, meaningfulness was found to have the strongest relation to different employee outcomes in terms of engagement. May, Gilson and Harter's (2004) study found that job enrichment and role fit were positively related to meaningfulness; rewarding co-worker and supportive supervisor relations were positively related to safety while adherence to co-worker norms and self-consciousness were negatively related;

resources available were positively related to psychological availability while participation in outside activities was negatively related (Saks and Gruman, 2014). The research of Kahn (1990) and May, Gilson and Harter (2004) described engagement from a psychological perspective and outlined the primary factors that affect its level. In a 1992 article on psychological presence, Kahn took this idea further. He proposed a recursive model of psychological engagement that links individual distractions, the social system, and work to the three conditions of engagement in the workplace (Shoko 2014).

Numerous studies have tried to test the three psychological conditions and engagement. A study by Rothmann and Rothmann (2010) established that “20% of the total variance of psychological meaning and availability explains the variance of engagement among two samples from various organisations in South Africa” (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 10). An additional study by Van Zyl, Deacon and Rothmann (2010) also looked at “the relations between the experience of work-role fit, meaningfulness and engagement among industrial and organisational psychologists in South Africa” (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 10). Their findings revealed that those who saw their work as a ‘calling’ were likely to experience more psychological meaningfulness and engagement. A study by Rothmann and Welsh (2013) using a sample of 309 employees in a Namibian organisation reported that the effect size of psychological meaningfulness was almost double the size of psychological availability. These results suggested that employees who perceive a work-role fit and see the workplace as an environment where they can live out “their beliefs and values, tend to invest greater personal effort in their jobs”. The results also showed that “availability of resources and support from colleagues were (surprisingly) found to indirectly relate to engagement through psychological availability” (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 11).

Bailey *et al.* (2017) identified seven studies that specifically referred to Kahn’s (1990) engagement theory. However, it is suggested that this must be treated with some caution, as in some papers, the theories were not made as clear as they should be,

or the authors referred to various theories. It should be noted however, that Bailey *et al.* (2017: 38) chose to only report on the main theoretical frameworks. A search of the literature (Shoko 2014; Blakey 2017; Ahmed 2018; Pham-Thai *et al.* 2018) revealed that the application of Kahn's (1990) model in the higher education sector is limited with many authors not specifying a particular theory or merely refer to a range of different theoretical frameworks.

Interestingly, Blakey (2017), suggests that Kahn's concept of EE offers a compelling theoretical justification for additional investigation and subsequent empirical work, to support the model's applicability and increase its validity. Although Kahn's (1990) theory of employee engagement is frequently discussed and accepted in the literature, for example Luthans (2012) and May, Gilson and Harter (2004), there is surprisingly little ongoing empirical research using his model, including within the public sector and more specifically the higher education sector. In their attempts to develop a measure, May, Gilson and Harter (2004), for instance, demonstrate the significance of Kahn's three psychological states for predicting engagement. The notion of EE is also expanded by May, Gilson and Harter's (2004) research, which introduces the idea of the human spirit in the workplace and characterises engagement as a self-expression of fulfilment at work. The theoretical rigour and empirical foundation of Kahn's model, which can analyse cognitive, physical, and emotional aspects to explain employee role performance, led to its selection for the study by Blakey (2017). Blakey (2017) also suggested investigating EE as a state experienced by employees more specifically amongst full-time faculty employees. He suggested this employee experience is positive and significant for the advancement of EE research and significantly expands on earlier academic studies.

A more recent study by Ahmed (2018) also applied an adapted version of William Kahn's (1990) model to measure the engagement of faculty members at the Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University in Saudi Arabia. According to Ahmed (2018), Kahn's (1990) model is one of the most comprehensive models on EE. The author also suggested that Kahn's model is one of the first models to see EE as a "versatile

concept”. As mentioned in a previous discussion, EE, according to Kahn, is that relationship between the employee and the business in which the staff members must be completely engaged cognitively, emotionally, and physically. The study by Pham-Thai *et al.* (2018) titled *Job engagement in higher education* was based on Kahn’s engagement theory (and SET). The Vietnam study, amongst other contributions to the literature, focused on academic staff job engagement which they felt was neglected in previous studies and provided significant evidence obtained from a developing higher education sector within a developing country such as Vietnam (2018: 952).

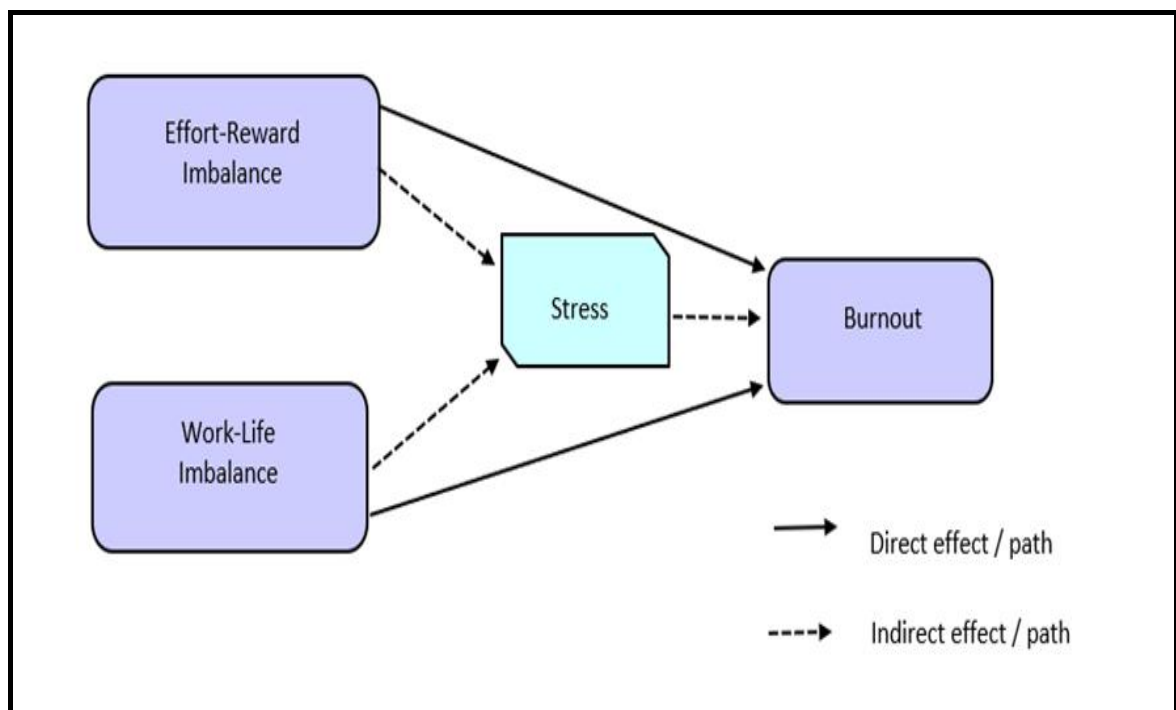
The one African study identified in higher education (Shoko 2014) chose to apply Kahn’s (1990, 1992) model to assess EE and its impact on OC among HEIs in Zimbabwe. The rationale for this choice is that Kahn’s model is one of the few to consider conditions of engagement at a conceptual level (Shoko 2014: 38). Shoko (2014: 39) further stated that other models appear to fit within Kahn’s three conditions. Although Kahn’s model of engagement has been tested in several types of studies, they have “failed to uncover a significant relationship between all three psychological conditions and engagement, which has resulted in unsatisfactory psychometric properties” (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 10). Kahn’s (1990) model also does not clarify the drivers and outcomes of engagement (Shoko 2014: 41). It has been suggested that Kahn’s model be used in conjunction with the Aon Hewitt model of engagement (discussed below) to clearly categorise the drivers of EE. The model would therefore clearly show how employees are affected cognitively, emotionally and physically while the Aon Hewitt model would highlight the outcomes of engagement (Shoko 2014: 42).

2.2.9.2 Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter’s Burnout Engagement Model (Individual)

The literature on job burnout informs the second theory of engagement (see Figure 2.4). Maslach and Leiter (1997) defined engagement as a combination of energy,

participation, and efficacy, each of which is the opposite of burnout. Burnout is defined as being emotionally weary, emotionally drained, and detached, cynical, and ineffectual. Employees are most productive when they are energised and engaged in personally rewarding activities. The positive antithesis of burnout, Maslach and Leiter's (1997) paradigm of engagement, assumes that burnout and engagement are on opposite ends of a spectrum.

Figure 2.4: Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter's model of employee engagement and burnout



Source: Padhi, Panda and Kumar (2015: 81)

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), in their assessment of the job burnout literature, examined job engagement as an extension of the burnout construct, noting that engagement is the opposite. It is worth noting that Maslach and her colleagues did not have a scale to assess engagement when they first proposed this concept. Employees who scored low on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) scale developed

by Maslach and Leiter (1997) were instead termed engaged (Osam 2018: 35). Later studies disagreed with this view (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004).

Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) discovered six antecedents that can lead to EE and therefore combat the effects of burnout, namely: (1) a sustainable workload, (2) feelings of choice and control, (3) appropriate rewards and recognition, (4) supportive community work, (5) fairness and justice, and (6) meaningful and valued work (Maslach and Leiter, 1997). These antecedents are moulded by the organisation's culture and are quite like those proposed by May, Gilson and Harter (2004) regarding Kahn's (1990) engagement model (Harris 2018: 43). Burnout is more likely when there is a large gap or mismatch between the person and these six antecedents. Conversely, the better the match or fit between a person and these six aspects of organisational life, the more engaged they are. In other words, sustained workload, feelings of choice and control, proper recognition and reward, a supportive work community, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work are all connected with engagement (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter 2001 cited in Harris 2018: 44). It was discovered that, like burnout, engagement is expected to mediate the relationship between the six work-life components and various work outcomes. Additionally, they claimed that burnout has always been linked to job characteristics, particularly feedback and autonomy (Padhi, Panda, and Kumar 2015: 80). Regarding the perception of fairness in the workplace, Maslach and Leiter (2008) found some support for their argument. This method also implies that, like burnout, engagement mediates the link between these six work-life aspects, work attitudes (such as job satisfaction and OC), and stress-related health outcomes. In other words, mismatches lead to burnout, while matches lead to engagement, which leads to work and health outcomes (Saks and Gruman 2014: 162). Management, according to Maslach and Leiter (1997), should devote time and effort to creating a feeling of community within their company. Employees who feel energised and eager to devote their time and effort to relevant job tasks are more likely to be engaged (Maslach and Leiter 1997). According to Maslach and Leiter's concept, promoting

engagement is one strategy to minimise burnout, and engagement allows organisations to better respond to those they serve (Harris 2018: 44).

Based on Maslach and her colleagues' studies, Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) coined the phrase "work engagement," which has now become the most often used engagement term (Shuck, Nimon and Zigarmi 2017). Maslach and colleagues' engagement paradigm was tested by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002), who utilised a slightly different definition and constructed a scale specifically to measure engagement. Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) and Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) provided alternative viewpoints on Maslach's model and regarded engagement "as an independent, distinct concept that is negatively related to burnout" (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 11). Engagement is defined as a "positive, rewarding, work-related frame of mind characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption," and "is associated with good mental health and increase in job resources over time" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004 as cited in Nienaber and Martins 2016: 6). The lack of a cognitive component distinguishes this type of engagement from EE (Shuck *et al.* 2017). Work engagement is solely concerned with the emotional and physical aspects of burnout. The burnout strategy was discovered to be the most cited by scholars examining engagement more than a decade ago (Christian and Slaughter 2007, cited in Osam, 2018: 37). Despite the introduction of other engagement frameworks following Christian and Slaughter's work, Schaufeli and his colleagues' burnout definition and measurement of engagement remains the most often utilized in engagement research (Shuck *et al.*, 2017).

The Burnout-Engagement model has been used more frequently by researchers studying EE at HEIs. The study by Coetzee and Rothmann (2005) looked at the work engagement of employees at an HEI in South Africa (the Vaal University of Technology) assessing specifically the "factorial validity" of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) amongst other objectives. The rationale being that the landscape of higher education in South Africa has changed dramatically which in turn inevitably impacts on the work engagement of employees. This, it concluded,

makes research on work engagement more relevant. This was supported by Barkhuizen and Rothmann's (2006) study regarding "work engagement of academic staff in South African higher education institutions". One of its objectives was to assess the psychometric properties of the UWES for academic staff across six South African HEIs. Specific reference was made to the burnout-engagement research of Maslach and Leiter (1997), Demerouti *et al.* (2001), Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) and Schaufeli and Bakker (2004). Barkhuizen and Rothmann's (2006) study highlighted the emergence of a so-called "knowledge economy" which has changed the traditional role of the academic in a critical manner (Blackmore 2001 cited in Barkhuizen and Rothmann 2006: 39). The authors also go on to state that academics are expected to be more than just teachers and researchers, but also entrepreneurs, facilitators, marketers and managers (Winter, Taylor and Sarros 2000, cited in Barkhuizen and Rothmann 2006: 39). It can therefore be assumed that having to perform such a plethora of roles could very easily result in role overload, "a particular salient stressor for the modern academic" (Fisher, 1994 cited in Barkhuizen and Rothmann, 2006: 39).

More recently, two studies by Hakeem and Gulzar (2015) and O'Day (2020) have both looked at EE in the higher education sector (internationally). The former study (2015) was an empirical study of EE in the higher education sector in Kashmir (India), using the UWES developed by Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) to measure EE, while the latter study (2020) investigated the predictors of EE at a large public research university in the United States of America. O'Day's (2020) study referred to Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter's (2001) research which identified burnout as a contributor to employee disengagement. According to O'Day (2020) burnout was found to be the "most significant predictor of employee engagement or disengagement". Hakeem and Gulzar (2015) concluded that burnout and engagement are comparable in that they are both stable, non-transient states that grow a little stronger with age. The two conditions may be related in that they may be at different extremes of a continuum, according to comparative studies of burnout and engagement. Therefore, it is logical to look at elements that are linked to burnout and fair to presume that those things

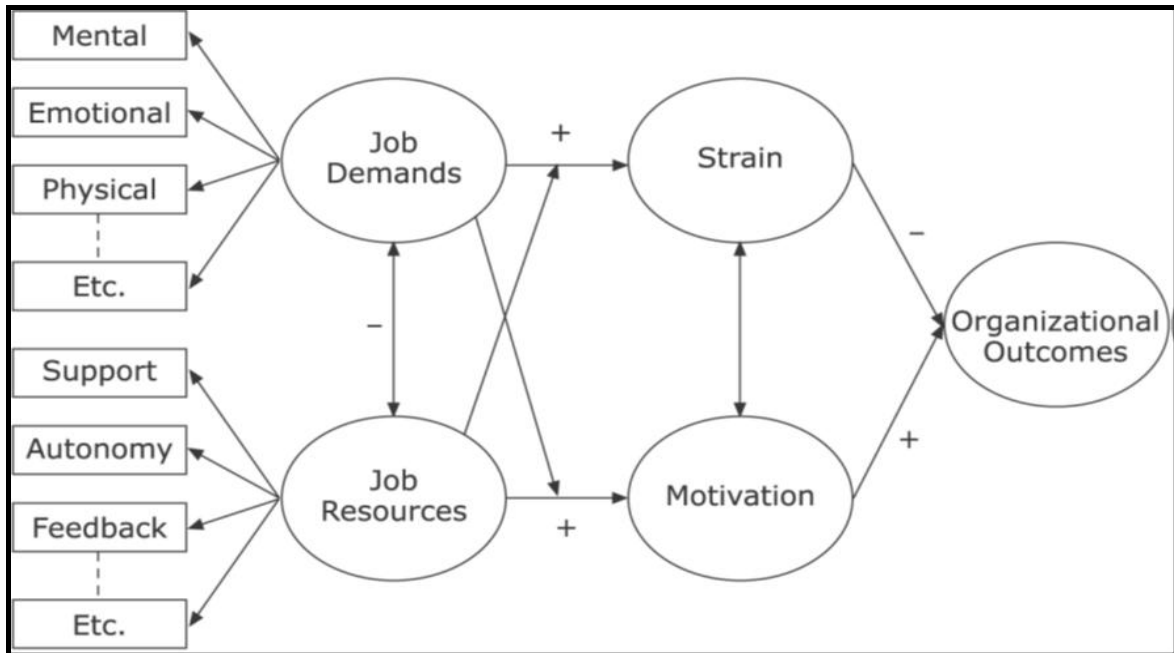
would have the opposite relationship to work engagement to begin to understand what may predict engagement.

However, Maslach *et al*'s. (2001) model clearly has certain limitations in that, burnout and engagement are significantly negatively correlated. This implies that it is unfeasible to assume that just because a worker is not burned out, it automatically follows that they are actively engaged in their work duties. However, a low level of engagement among employees does not always indicate burnout. This demonstrates unequivocally that using the same measurement tools to assess the relationship between both constructs precludes any empirical investigation. This is the main reason that the UWES was developed (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004) and is now the preferred measurement tool used to assess engagement. This was a clear rejection of Maslach *et al*'s. (2001) concept of engagement as a positive antithesis to burnout (Kunte and Rungruang 2018 :439). Schaufeli *et al*. (2002) and Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) therefore did not agree with Maslach *et al*'s. (2001) view that engagement can be measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and that instead it should be measured using the UWES (Nienaber and Martins, 2016:6).

2.2.9.3 The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model: Bakker and Demerouti (2007) (Operational)

A third theory of EE, which also has its roots in the burnout literature, is the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007 cited in Saks and Gruman, 2014: 161). The JD-R model of burnout was first used by Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, and Schaufeli (2001). The model (see Figure 2.5) was used to show how there are two ways burnout can occur. First, high job demands that result in tiredness cause burnout. Second, a shortage of job resources causes workers to retreat or stop caring about their jobs (Saks and Gruman, 2014: 161).

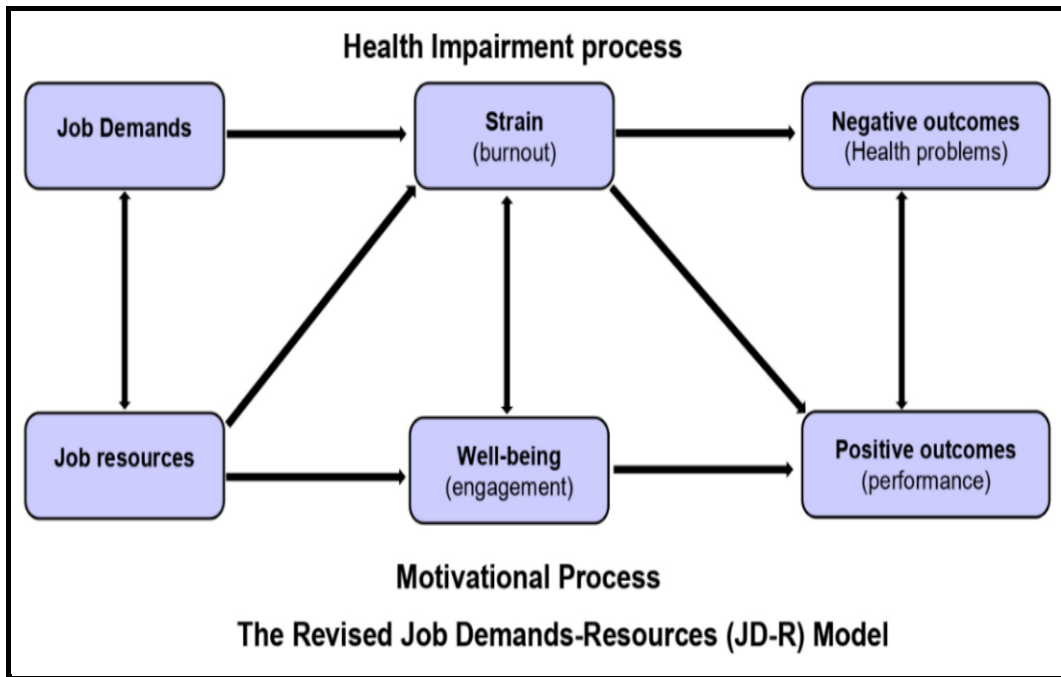
Figure 2.5: The Job Demands-Resources Model



Source: Bakker and Demerouti (2007: 313)

Three years after its introduction, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) presented a revised version of the JD-R model (see Figure 2.6). The relationship between job demands-resources (JD-R model) has been used to describe how job resources impact employees' level of engagement. The JD-R model has been used as a useful framework in a significant number of studies to understand how engagement can be promoted inside the organisation (Nienaber and Martins, 2016: 14).

Figure 2.6: The revised Job Demands-Resources Model



Source: Schaufeli and Taris (2014: 46) (Adapted)

The JD-R framework makes a distinction between demands and resources, which might be either job-related or personal resources. Resources energise staff members and encourage involvement, which produces positive results including elevated levels of well-being and performance (Bailey *et al.* 2017: 36). Due to the extra effort required by job demands, employees may eventually become exhausted and experience unpleasant outcomes. As a result, the JD-R model "explains" engagement because employees are more likely to be engaged with their work when they have elevated levels of job-related and/or personal resources.

Job demands are defined as the physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of a job that call for a person to exert persistent physical, mental, and/or psychological effort, which may have a negative impact on their physical or mental health. Work overload, job instability, role uncertainty, deadline pressure, and role conflict are typical job demands (Bailey *et al.* 2017: 36). Job resources are any organisational, social, psychological, or physical aspects of a job that are useful for

achieving work objectives, lowering workload expectations, and promoting employee development (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 68-69). The organisation of work (role clarity, participation in decision-making, pay, career opportunities and job security), the interpersonal and social relations (support from supervisor and co-workers, as well as team climate), the task itself (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and performance feedback) are all types of job resources (Saks and Gruman 2014: 162). This supports the job characteristics theory of Hackman and Oldham (1980), which highlights the motivational potential of job resources at the task level, such as autonomy, feedback, and task relevance. (Bakker and Demerouti 2007: 312).

The fundamental tenet of the JD-R model is that job demands and resources interact with engagement and burnout through a variety of methods. First, job resources stimulate motivation, which can increase levels of engagement, upbeat attitudes, and wellbeing while reducing the risk of burnout (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Crawford, LePine and Rich 2010). Job resources are thought to contribute to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The motivating potential of job resources can be extrinsic or intrinsic, depending on whether they are necessary for achieving work-related objectives or satisfying and facilitating basic psychological needs like growth, learning, and development (Bakker, Albrecht and Leiter 2011; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Job resources are crucial because they assist people in adjusting to the demands of their jobs and lessen the impact of those demands on stress and burnout (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Second, demanding jobs deplete workers' physical and mental resources, increase stress, and deplete their energy, which can result in burnout, disengagement, and health issues (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, 2008).

According to Schaufeli and Salanova (2011), a segment of researchers who view engagement as the antithesis of burnout prefer the JD-R model primarily because the latter constructs are handled separately to incorporate an all-encompassing conceptual model of engagement. How successfully employees manage the stress brought on by their jobs' demands and how involved they are in the day-to-day task

of satisfying those needs are related to both their professional and personal resources.

This model has been used in numerous studies (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti and Xanthopoulou 2007; Bakker, Van Emmerick and Van Riet 2008; Crawford, LePine, and Rich, 2010; Hakanen and Roodt, 2010; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli, 2007), and the results show that while job resources do reduce job demands, each occupation and organisation has its own distinct set of demands and resources. It is generally accepted that "Employees who are surrounded by resourceful job characteristics are more likely to experience a general feeling of psychological freedom (i.e., autonomy), interpersonal connectedness (i.e. belongingness), and effectiveness (i.e. competence), which in turn explains why they feel less exhausted, and more vigorous in their jobs." (Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, and Lens, 2008 cited in Harris, 2018: 48). On the contrary, it appears that employees who have a demanding job are more likely to have their basic psychological needs unmet and to feel more exhausted as a result. JD-R asserts that supervisor support, autonomy, and performance feedback are useful antecedents to engagement, in line with other models mentioned (Bakker and Demerouti 2007 cited in Harris, 2018: 49).

In recent years, the JD-R model has been expanded to include 'personal resources', which refer to "aspects of the self that are generally linked to resiliency and refer to an individual's sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully" (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli, 2007 cited in Saks and Gruman 2014: 162). Personal resources are individual traits that are thought to be stimulated by workplace resources and connected to work engagement, such as self-efficacy, optimism, and organisational-based self-esteem. Personal resources are therefore flexible and subject to change (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, and Schaufeli 2009a cited in Saks and Gruman 2014: 162). According to research on personal resources, they serve as a mediator in the interaction between job resources (such as autonomy, social support,

coaching from supervisors, and chances for professional development) and work engagement and tiredness (Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2007). There is also some evidence that job and personal resources are interdependent (Xanthopoulou *et al.* 2009a, cited in Saks and Gruman 2014: 163).

According to Bailey *et al.* 2017 (cited in Byrne and McDonagh 2017: 191), the job-demands resources (JD-R) model of Bakker and Demerouti (2007 2014) is the most popular theoretical framework used to explain how and why employees become engaged. As discussed above, the model organises working conditions into two areas: (1) stressful or (2) helpful, with the stressful features classified as job demands and the helpful features classified as job resources (Bakker and Demerouti 2007, cited in Byrne and MacDonagh 2017: 191). An extensive search of the literature on engagement in the public sector and more specifically the higher education sector has also revealed that the JD-R model is applied more frequently in this sector as opposed to other models. Approximately ten studies (Rothmann and Jordaan 2006; Boyd, Bakker, Pignata, Winefield, Gillespie and Stough 2011; Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014; Byrne and MacDonagh 2017; Mercali and Costa 2019; Borst, Kruijnen and Lako 2019; Diedricks, Cilliers and Bezuidenhout 2019; Naidoo-Chetty and Du Plessis 2021; Nuamcharoen and Javakorn 2021; Theron 2022) were all identified in the search as preferring the JD-R model when attempting to explain engagement amongst public sector workers, academics and other university staff. This list includes both international and local studies and is not exhaustive but does confirm the popularity of the JD-R model when assessing engagement in this sector. For example, the study by Byrne and MacDonagh (2017) assessed EE amongst higher education workers at an Irish university. Although their study adopted a multi-foci approach to engagement, which advocates looking at the relationship workers have with their work and the organisation, they did however, highlight the rationale of the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, 2014), that employees within the public service are more likely to be engaged if they believe their jobs provide them with sufficient resources to handle their job demands. The authors go on to state that even though there has not

been as much research on EE in the public sector as there has been in the private sector, some important job resources that support EE in the public sector, such as Perceptions of Organisational Support (POS) and employee voice, have been found in both the international and Irish contexts (Byrne and MacDonagh, 2017: 192). Other international studies include, Boyd *et al.* (2011) who conducted a longitudinal test of the Job Demands-Resources Model among Australian academics; Nuamcharoen and Javakorn (2021) who conducted a study on EE models for the sustainability of long-distance learning in public HEIs in Thailand; Mercali and Costa's (2018) study on the antecedents of work engagement of higher education professors in Brazil; and Borst, Kruijnen and Lako (2019) who explored the job demands-resources model of work engagement in the public sector in the Netherlands with the aim of extending the JD-R model of work engagement using insights from the public administration literature.

From the list identified earlier in the discussion, we can also identify critical South African studies applying the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti 2001; 2007; 2014). These include research papers by Rothmann and Jordaan (2006) and Barkhuizen *et al.* (2014). These studies have been referenced in other international and local studies, for example Diedricks, Cilliers and Bezuidenhout, 2019; Byrne and MacDonagh, 2017, focusing on the JD-R model in higher education and the public sector as stated above. The study by Rothmann and Jordaan (2006) investigated the job demands, job resources and work engagement of academic staff in South African HEIs, while the study by Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver (2014) investigated "the relationships among dispositional optimism, job demands and resources, burnout, work engagement, ill health and organisational commitment of SA academic staff in higher education institutions." Two recent South African studies have applied the JD-R model in the higher education sector. The first is that of Naidoo-Chetty and du Plessis (2021) who conducted a systematic review of the job demands and resources of academic staff within HEIs utilising the JD-R model as the primary theoretical framework. The second is the study by Theron (2022) whose primary objective was to construct and empirically evaluate a structural model,

derived from theory, that explores work- and non-work-related factors that may potentially affect EE and burnout among academic staff in the higher education sector of South Africa. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Demerouti *et al.* 2001) served as a guiding theoretical structure to explore this goal.

Although job resources and job challenge demands are crucial for employees to be engaged in their work and roles, they represent a very constrained and limited approach to EE. According to Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010: 844), the JD-R model has a shortcoming, in that it does not take into account all important determinants of EE, and its "greatest use is to broadly characterize 'working conditions' as either job resources or demands in predicting engagement" (cited in Saks and Gruman 2014: 163).

Several theories of EE have been developed, but most research on EE is based on the JD-R model (Bailey *et al.* 2017: 37). There has however, not been much attempt to integrate Kahn's need satisfying theory with the JD-R model. According to Saks and Gruman (2014: 163), there is no generally accepted theory on EE. The authors go on to state that there are also many questions as to whether the JD-R model is really a theory of engagement, or just a framework for classifying job demands and job resources. Bargagliotti (2012 cited in Bailey *et al.*, 2017: 37) casts doubt on the JD-R model/theory in which she argues that the model is a transactional model that is unable to explain "behaviour and motivation in complex or adverse situations such as those dealing with medical emergencies. The JD-R paradigm, according to Bargagliotti (2012, cited in Bailey *et al.* 2017), "relegates the dedication of nurses, a distinguishing feature of the profession, to being a transactional commodity that arises when someone else distributes resources." Furthermore, it is far from conclusive that resources increase engagement while demands decrease it. Demands can either increase or decrease engagement, or they can have no effect at all, according to studies by Crawford, LePine and Rich (2010); Braine and Roodt (2011); Inoue, Kawakami, Tsuno, Shimazu, Tomioka and Nakanishi (2013). This suggests that challenge and hindrance demands, namely demands that create

positive challenges versus demands that create constraints, might operate in different ways that are still not fully understood (Bailey *et al.* 2017: 37).

The JD-R model operates as a linear model that assumes people are only motivated to improve their situation and respond in rational ways to a limited number of aspects of their work environment. It does not account for heterogeneous, micro- and macro-level contextual factors, interpersonal interactions, or emotional or irrational responses. It neglects to address concerns of politics and power in the workplace, as well as the issue of who controls the resources and demands faced by employees (Fineman 2006, cited in Bailey *et al.* 2017: 37). The model also disregards diversity-related aspects. According to Banihani, Lewis and Syed (2013), engagement may very well be a gendered construct, with access to the engagement-related antecedents possibly more readily available to men than to women, and with the display of engagement-related behaviours possibly more integral to the expression of masculinity than femininity in the workplace. The model also focuses mainly on resources as drivers of engagement but does not highlight the strength of other drivers on EE (Shoko 2014: 41). In addition, the basic premise of the model is that the more resources an employee has, the more engaged he/she will be. This does not explain what resources will be more important than others for facilitating engagement (Schaufeli and Taris 2014: 55). Shoko (2014: 42) suggests that the model should exhaust all drivers of engagement as a means of developing various strategies to improve EE.

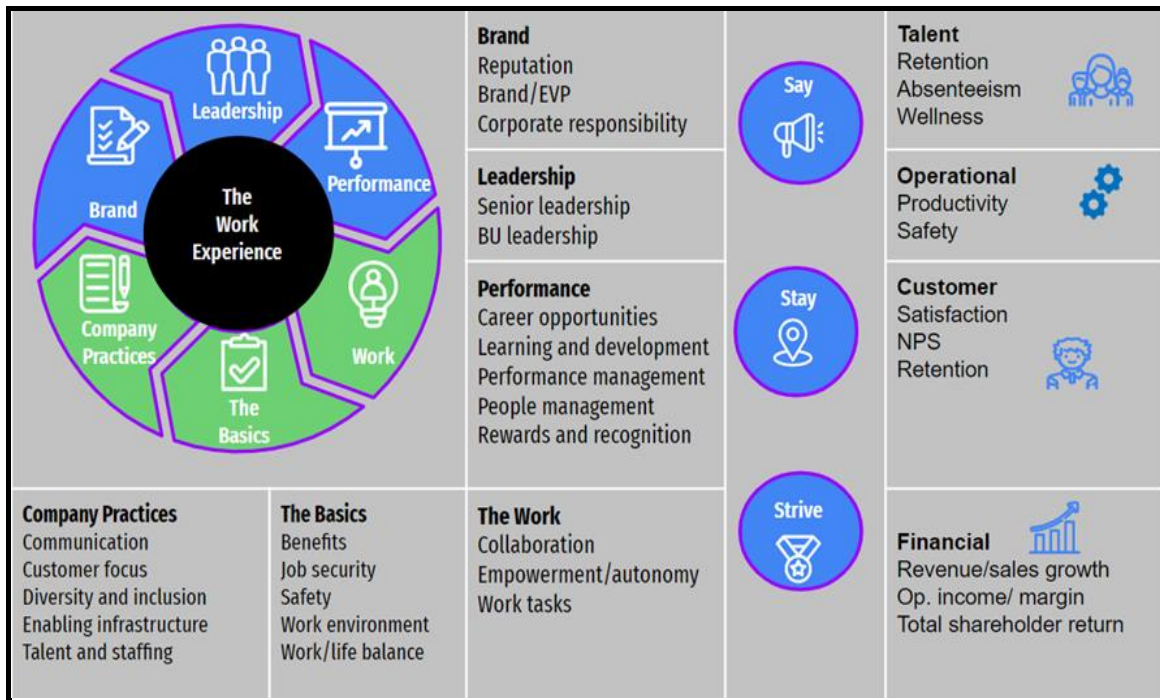
It is critical that further research is required regarding which resources are the most important for engagement as well as when and why they will be related to engagement. Therefore, Kahn's (1990, 1992) theory is more convincing as it specifies the psychological conditions (meaningfulness, safety and availability) leading to engagement as well as the factors that influence each of the psychological conditions (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 69). In fact, Saks and Gruman (2014: 171) stated that a theory of EE should include Kahn's (1990, 1992) three psychological conditions. The JD-R model also has the drawback of emphasizing

"work" engagement, despite the fact there are other forms of EE, as evidenced by the many terms used to describe engagement (Saks and Gruman 2014: 171).

2.2.9.4 Aon Hewitt Model (Operational and Individual)

Engagement is defined by Aon Hewitt as the emotional and intellectual condition that drives people to produce their best work, using very specific behavioural parameters (Rawat and Dadas, 2019: 100). The model (see Figure 2.7) explained EE "as the level of rational thought, emotions, behaviours, intentions invested by employees in the organisation" (Manjaree and Perera 2021: 774). The organisational drivers and business outcomes of engagement, in addition to the individual outcome - engagement itself - are all included in the Aon Hewitt engagement model above. The Aon Hewitt approach considers both an individual's engagement results and prospective engagement factors that are a part of the organisational work experience (Hewitt 2015). According to Hewitt Associates LLC (2004, cited in Shoko 2014), EE is the condition in which people are intellectually and emotionally devoted to the organisation or group, as indicated by the three fundamental behaviours of Say, Stay, and Strive.

Figure 2.7: AON Hewitt model of engagement



Source: AON Hewitt model of employee engagement (2015: 1) (Adapted)

The model also indicates how businesses can benefit as shown by the business outcomes (last column). These include (a) increased wellness, retention and talent which decreases absenteeism, this leads to (b) increased safety and operational productivity, (c) if the organisation takes care of its internal customers, then the external customers will be taken care of as well. This increases customer satisfaction and retention, which in turn boosts net profits, (d) because of these, the revenues, operational income and shareholder returns also increase. (Rawat and Dadas 2019: 101)

Engagement is believed to combine a number of characteristics that are commonly acknowledged in academic literature, such as affective and continuous commitment, motivation, and organisational citizenship actions. Practically speaking, this means that engagement encompasses a blend of deliberate thought, feelings, intentions, and behaviours necessary for the best performance and productivity. Table 2.9

illustrates how EE is operationalised as a construct of six major elements made up of three observable features of "say, stay, and strive" with two items each (Aon Hewitt, 2015: 1). The model also identifies 22 organisational antecedents known as "Engagement Drivers" – factors that can potentially drive an individual's engagement as indicated in the table above (Rawat and Dadas 2019: 101).

Table 2.9: Operationalisation of employee engagement (AON Hewitt)

ENGAGEMENT	CONTENT	ITEMS IN AON HEWITT OPERATIONAL DEFINITION
Say	Speak positively about the organisation to co-workers, potential employees, and customers	• I would not hesitate to recommend this organisation to a friend seeking employment • Given the opportunity, I tell others great things about working here
Stay	Have an intense sense of belonging and desire to be part of the organisation	• It would take a lot to get me to leave this organisation • I rarely think about leaving the organisation to work somewhere else
Strive	Are motivated and exert effort towards success in their job and for the company	• The organisation inspires me to do my best work every day • This organisation motivates me to contribute more than is normally required to complete my work

Source: Aon Hewitt's model of Employee Engagement (2015: 2). Adapted.

This definition of "say, stay, and strive" was developed from the tens of thousands of managerial interviews and focus groups held throughout the world by Aon Hewitt to learn more about the attitudes and behaviours of engaged workers. According to the Say, Stay, Strive model, an employee is only considered to be engaged when they speak highly of their employer to co-workers, prospective employees, and

customers; feel a strong sense of belonging and a desire to work for the company; and give it their all on the job to ensure the company's success (Manjaree and Perera, 2021: 774). To be called "engaged," an employee, according to the model, must demonstrate all three aspects of saying, staying, and striving. Over 15 years of study on millions of employees from various firms and industries in Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and North America have tested and verified this EE model. Numerous studies in the field of organisational psychology have backed the approach (Rawat and Dadas 2019: 100).

In 2015 and 2016, surveys on EE that included 5 million respondents from more than 60 industries were conducted internationally using the Aon Hewitt model. According to the findings, 24% of employees were very engaged, and 39% were moderately engaged. Globally, 63% of employees were reported to be engaged in their work in 2016, down from 65% in 2015. The engagement index's components, such as the Say component, which fell from 69% to 68%, Stay, which fell from 60% to 59%, and Strive, which fell from 64% to 63%, all experienced declines. According to the report, big technological advancements and populist limits on the movement of labour between nations may be to blame for the fall in engagement (Manjaree and Perera 2021: 775)

The Aon Hewitt model does not seem to be very popular with studies linked to engagement in the higher education sector. A search of the literature yielded two studies which have been referred to in previous discussions of other EE models above. The study by Shoko (2014) investigated EE amongst workers in HEIs in Zimbabwe. The Aon Hewitt model was briefly discussed but the study actually chose to apply Kahn's (1990) model. A more recent study by Nuamcharoen and Javakorn (2021) investigated various EE models for the sustainability of long-distance learning at public HEIs in Thailand. However, their study investigated four models of EE, namely, Saks' multidimensional model (2006), the J-DR model, Penna's hierarchy of engagement model (2006) and the Aon Hewitt model (2011). It can therefore be concluded that the Aon Hewitt model for EE is either very limited in its application in

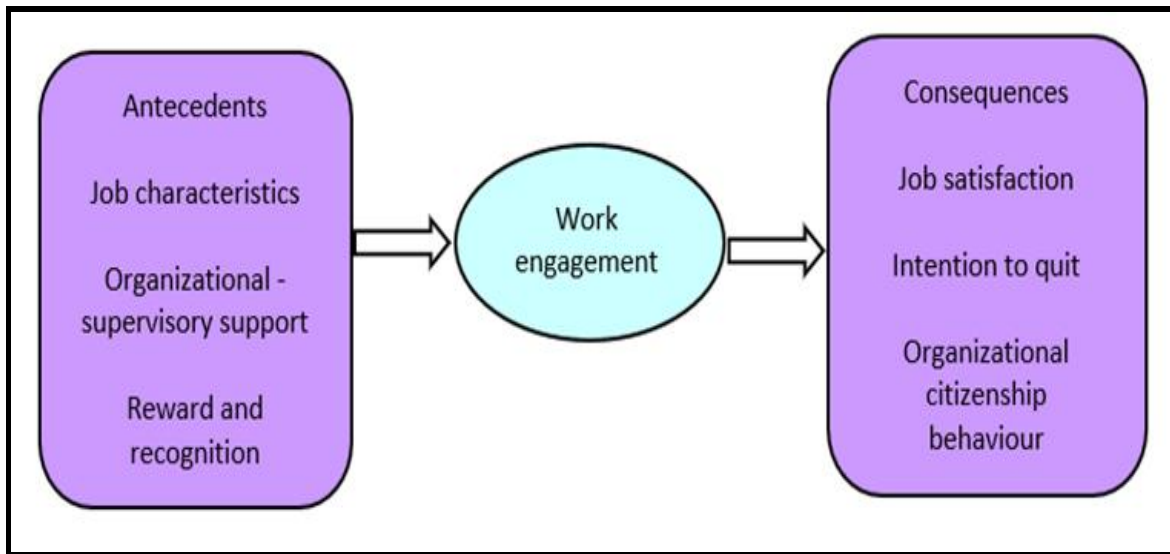
the higher education sector or that academic researchers have merely chosen not to investigate its application within the higher education context, giving more attention to other models. This may create an area for probable future research.

The Aon Hewitt Engagement Model does have certain limitations, for example, it concentrates more on the drivers of EE but does not really link these drivers back to the original model of EE. There is therefore a need to link the drivers with Kahn's engagement model to align the drivers with the three types of engagement identified by Kahn (1990 cited in Shoko, 2014: 42).

2.2.9.5 Social Exchange Model – Saks (2006) (Strategic)

The last engagement model discussed is the one developed by Alan Saks, which is well known for taking a multidimensional approach to engagement. According to Saks (2006: 603), Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers a more compelling theoretical justification for EE. Saks (2006) defines engagement as the extent to which an individual is attentive and engrossed in carrying out his or her tasks (Harris 2018: 48). He also regards engagement as “a distinct and unique construct consisting of cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with an individual's role performance” (Nienaber and Martins 2016: 7). In the study by Bailey *et al.* (2017), the SET was identified as the second most widely used framework for explaining engagement. According to the SET, relationships between employees and employers are based on norms of reciprocity. Where employees feel that they are being treated well and valued by their employer, they are more likely to respond by exerting effort on behalf of the employer in the form of raised levels of engagement (Bailey *et al.* 2017: 36). Saks (2006: 603) stated that although Kahn's (1990) and Maslach's (2001) models identify the psychological conditions or antecedents needed for engagement, they don't fully elaborate on the reason individuals respond to these conditions with varying degrees of engagement.

Figure 2.8: Saks' Social Exchange model of engagement



Source: Padhi, Panda and Kumar (2015: 82)

Saks (2006) believes that his model (see Figure 2.8) is similar to other models in its capacity to pinpoint the antecedents for engagement. However, his model goes one step further by developing an argument behind the reasons why individuals choose to respond to these antecedents with varying forms of engagement (Harris 2018: 48). Saks argued that engagement is one method for people to give back or reciprocate the benefits they feel they receive from their organisations. This essentially means that employees will choose to engage themselves to varying degrees in response to the resources they received from their organisation (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 69). Saks's (2006) model of engagement separated EE into two main categories: Job Engagement (JE) and Organisational Engagement (OE) (Harris 2018: 48). This was based on the belief that individuals perform multiple roles within an organisation. Saks's model (2006) suggests that individuals repay the organisation through their level of engagement. This engagement is thereby influenced through the antecedents of job characteristics, perceived organisational support, perceived supervisor support, rewards and recognition, procedural justice, and distributive justice (Saks 2006). Engaged workers are therefore more likely to have improved quality relationships with their organisations, which results in a greater "reciprocal exchange of positive attitudes, reduced turnover intentions, and

better OCB (Saks 2006). The exchange transaction proposed by Saks in his model serves as a link between the construct of EE from employee action to the reciprocal exchange attainment of organisational objective through the theoretical foundation discovered in SET (Harris 2018: 49).

Therefore, the significance of Saks's work is that it addressed the question of the status of the concept. He was able to address fears that the EE concept was merely a buzzword and not a serious construct by providing a convincing argument that EE is a scientific concept. This removed any hindrances to scholarly work. "His endorsement of the construct and recognition of the surprising dearth of academic work on it, inspired subsequent scientific endeavours" (Welch 2011: 334). Saks's (2006) work signified the beginning of extensive academic research on EE.

Welch (2011) states that Saks' (2006) research was at the forefront of EE work between 2006 and 2010. Since Saks' (2006) study, other studies that have used Saks' conception of engagement, revealed that it shares two of the four key features of EE: an active pull and the state-based nature of EE (Shuck *et al.* 2017, cited in Osam 2018: 34). Additionally, Shuck *et al.* 2017 (cited in Osam, 2018: 34) highlighted "that organisational engagement focuses only on an employee's psychological presence within an organisation, thus making it a narrower view of EE." Saks's (2006) research, however, did bridge the gap between previous early theories of EE, practitioner literature and the academic community. It was also the first type of research to propose an empirical model for EE (Shuck and Wollard 2010: 100). Saks (2006) stated that Kahn (1990) and Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) provided the two earliest theoretical frameworks for understanding EE (Dagher, Chapa and Junaid 2015; Shuck and Wollard 2010).

In addition, since Saks's (2006) critical research on EE, various studies have expanded on his model for EE. For example, research by Rich, LePine and Crawford (2010), was one of the first known EE studies to study the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects of Kahn's (1990) conceptualisation of engagement, paralleling

Saks (2006) model of engagement. Work by Macey and Schneider (2008) extended Saks (2006) model by suggesting that each preceding state of engagement (cognitive-emotional-behavioural) builds on the next, thereby resulting in complete engagement (Kahn, 1990). This was the first type of research in academic literature (Shuck, 2011: 315). In 2009, Zigarmi, Nimon, Houson, Witt, and Diehl published conceptual research using a multidimensional approach built from previous frameworks such as Kahn (1990); Maslach *et al.* (2001); Ryan and Deci (2003); Schaufeli *et al.* (2002); and Vallerand and Houliort (2003), albeit slightly unique from Saks (2006) (Shuck, 2011: 315).

Shuck and Wollard (2010) conducted a historical analysis of EE. From the review, they defined EE, specifically for the field of HRD, as a cognitive, emotional and behavioural state directed toward desired organisational outcomes. This definition used the multidimensional framework developed by Saks (2006) but also included pioneering research on engagement (Kahn 1990; Maslach Schaufeli and Leiter 2001; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002) and grounded in the emerging frameworks of Macey *et al.* (2009); Macey and Schneider (2008); and Saks (2006). Saks's (2006) multidimensional approach continues to be cited widely in the literature (Macey and Schneider 2008; Shuck, Osam, Zigarmi and Nimon 2017) and is often used as a framework for emerging EE models, such as Macey *et al.*, 2009; Dalal, Brummel, Wee and Thomas 2008 (Osam 2018; Shuck 2011).

Bailey *et al.* (2017) reported that the SET is the second most widely used framework for explaining engagement. Although Saks's (2006) model underpinned by SET presents a multi-dimensional approach to engagement, the number of studies applying this model to the higher education or public sector is limited. Three studies were identified from the literature search. These include the research studies by Anyalor, Nwali and Agbionu (2018); Pham-Thai, McMurray, Muenjohn and Muchiri (2018) and Nuamcharoen and Javakorn (2021). Agbionu *et al.* (2018) investigated EE and the performance of lecturers in Nigerian tertiary institutions, with their research hinging on the SET and Saks's (2006) model of engagement. Pham-Thai

et al's. (2018) study looked at job engagement in higher education in Australia specifically referring to two frameworks: (1) Kahn's engagement theory and (2) SET. Nuamcharoen and Javakorn's (2021) Thailand study investigated four models one of which was the model of antecedents and consequences of EE by Saks (2006).

According to Shoko (2014: 41), this model (SET) is not very clear on the drivers of engagement and does not indicate the levels of EE. Shoko (2014) goes on to state that the SET model should be linked with other models to clearly explain the EE construct and the drivers of engagement. The model also tends to adopt a contingent approach where parties are in a state of reciprocal interdependence. The research involving this model does seem to confirm what Shoko (2014) suggests above. Most of the studies discussed above applied Saks's (2006) model with other models of engagement, for example: Aon Hewitt, Kahn, and the J-DR.

This research aims to assess the influence of EE on workplace conflict in a selected UoT within the SA higher education sector. The literature review extracts common influences on EE from differing models. To provide a logical and understandable review the many contextual factors are addressed within the JD-R model of EE. This is due to the popularity of the model in explaining how and why employees become engaged as well as it being the most widely applied EE engagement model within the higher education sector. However, due to the limitations of the JD-R model of engagement as indicated above, Saks' (2006) model will also be linked to this research in order to provide a more complete understanding of the concept of EE. In conclusion, it is agreed that engagement theory has its roots in positive psychology (Fineman 2006). Engagement theories have mostly been explored at the level of the individual. However, it might be argued that adding additional theoretical concepts from organisational sociology approaches that take politics and power into account will improve our knowledge of engagement (Shuck 2020).

Table 2.10 provides a summary of a number of the studies conducted within the public and higher education sectors and the respective applications of the models

discussed above. It is clear from the discussion above and Table 2.10 that most of the studies identified applied the J D-R Model within the public and higher education sectors. It is important to note, however, that this list is not exhaustive but does seem to reflect the direction of many EE studies within the public and higher education sectors.

Table 2.10: Application of employee engagement models in the public sector and higher education sector

KAHN'S NEED SATISFACTION MODEL (1990)	BURNOUT-ENGAGEMENT MODEL (2001)	JOB DEMANDS-RESOURCES MODEL (2001)	AON HEWITT MODEL (2004)	SAKS MULTIDIMENSIONAL AND SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY (SET) (2006)
Shoko (2014): Zimbabwe	Coetzee and Rothmann (2006): South Africa	Rothmann and Jordaan (2006): South Africa	Nuamcharoen and Javakorn (2021): Thailand	Agbionu, Anyalor and Nwali (2018): Nigeria
Blakey (2017): Canada	Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2006): South Africa	Boyd, Bakker, Pignata, Winefield, Gillespie and Stough (2011): Australia	Shoko (2014): Zimbabwe	Pham-Thai, McMurray, Muenjohn and Muchiri (2018): Vietnam
Ahmed (2018): Saudi Arabia	Hakeem and Gulzar (2015): India	Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijer (2014): South Africa		Nuamcharoen and Javakorn (2021): Thailand
Pham-Thai, McMurray, Muenjohn and Muchiri (2018): Vietnam	O'Day (2020): USA	Byrne and MacDonagh (2017): Ireland		
Amoo and Swart (2021): South Africa		Mercali and Costa (2018): Brazil		
		Diedricks, Cilliers and Bezuidenhout (2019): South Africa		
		Borst, Kruijven and Lako (2019): Netherlands		
		Naidoo-Chetty and du Plessis (2021): South Africa		
		Nuamcharoen and Javakorn (2021): Thailand		
		Theron (2022): South Africa		

Source: Self-generated.

2.2.10 Challenges of employee engagement in the higher education context

2.2.10.1 International

In the context of staff in HE, there appears to be a dearth of research in the field of EE. When the Gallup organisation created the Q12 employee engagement survey in 1999, 230 firms and more than 80,000 employees were polled (Buckingham and Coffman, 1999 cited in O'Day 2020). Despite this, only 3% of the organisations polled were in the field of education, and just 0.5% of respondents overall claimed to be employed in the field, with it being unclear if they were employed in K–12 (U.S public school grades 1-12) or higher education (Buckingham and Coffman 1999, cited in O'Day 2020). There hasn't been much of a shift in the level of EE among employees in the 20 years since the launch of the Q12 survey, and it is therefore critical to carry on with research on the topic (O'Day 2020: 4).

Since *First, Break all the rules* was published more than 20 years ago, Gallup has expanded its research on involvement in higher education and discovered that 66% of faculty and staff are disengaged (O'Day 2020: 7). Employee disengagement is common, which may suggest management staff are not making the necessary efforts to engage their workers. This will negatively impact productivity, profitability, retention, and customer satisfaction (Buckingham and Coffman 1999, cited in O'Day 2020). Additional research by Daniels (2016, cited in O'Day 2020) evaluated EE at two Christian HEIs, using a qualitative methodology. Daniels (2016, cited in O'Day 2020) was able to pinpoint institutional elements that encouraged EE by interviewing 53 people from the two organisations. These institutional traits included a sense of forward momentum, a sense of shared mission and community, and empowered human resources departments (Daniels 2016, cited in O'Day 2020). Although there is little research on EE in the education sector, Daniels' research makes a significant connection to EE components that were previously identified in the business sector and concluded that these components are also present in the education sector, particularly the higher education sector. (O'Day 2020: 7)

In comparison to other post-secondary institutions and the public sector, recent EE survey results at a Canadian HEI (pseudonym: Western Polytechnic College) showed low levels of engagement. The recognition levels they receive and the inconsistent application of recognition across the college, according to the faculty and staff, have left them dissatisfied (Habiballah 2021). Moreover, the survey's findings showed that staff members longed for greater feedback from their academic managers. Interestingly, the survey results showed that academic managers lack the coaching and mentoring abilities needed to effectively train faculty and staff (Habiballah 2021). Employee engagement unquestionably enhances performance and gives organisations a competitive advantage. Additionally, in a higher education setting, engaged instructors give more of themselves to their students and are crucial to their academic success (Carrell and Kurlaender, 2020; Guzzardo, Khosla, Adams, Bussman, Engelman, Ingraham, Gamba, Jones-Bey, Moore, Toosi and Taylor 2021 (cited in Habiballah, 2021)).

Because it affects future economic growth, education is crucial to the development of any nation. The development of a knowledge community and, more importantly, a nation's ability to compete internationally are both driven by highly trained populations with better educational backgrounds. Higher education institutions especially provide significant contributions to a country's wealth due to their hard-edged capacity to foster intellectual capital and to encourage development, innovation, and in-depth knowledge (Barkhuizen 2005; Engle 2012, cited in Theron 2022: 2). Over the past few decades, HEIs have experienced significant changes on a global scale, including rising expectations for extraordinary research output and instructional quality, internationalisation, and massification. As a result of these developments, the academic working environment has become incredibly stressful, which has negative implications for institutional productivity and student learning as well as problems for career and personal growth. According to Sabagh, Hall and Saroyan (2018, cited in Theron 2022: 7), these negative consequences are exacerbated, especially when there isn't a comparable rise in resources. In reality, a lack of resources and a plethora of expectations are leading to a troubling

disproportion in the surroundings of HEIs across the globe (Barkhuizen and Rothmann 2008). Similar to this, Van den Berg, Manias and Burger (2009, cited in Theron, 2022: 8) point out that changes to the higher education system have led to new expectations that are frequently not supported by a corresponding allocation of suitable resources, leading to increased job stresses and strain as well as the gradual loss of motivation and commitment.

When it comes to recruiting and retaining talented academic and non-academic staff, higher education faces unique obstacles. For-profit businesses are often concerned with their bottom lines and prioritise profit maximisation. HEIs, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with "prestige maximisation" and competing for position and status (Jo 2008, cited in Yeaman 2021). As a result, university personnel face different obstacles to for-profit company employees (Jo 2008, cited in Yeaman 2021). These include limited resources or faculty members' opposition to full acceptance within the academic community. As a result, traditional organisational ideas may no longer be applicable.

A study in the US by Jo (2008, cited in Yeaman 2021), stated that the average American changes jobs at least seven times in their career. Administrators are therefore expected to develop ways to retain talented people as human capital becomes an organisation's competitive advantage (Takawira, Coetzee and Schroeder 2014, cited in Yeaman 2021). According to Johnsrud (2002, cited in Yeaman 2021), this is rarely a priority, due to the numerous issues that university senior leadership faces both internally and externally. The disparity in work functions and cultures among academics and staff is a common theme in higher education. There is usually a clear distinction between academic and non-academic staff roles in most, if not all, universities. Indeed, disparities in work responsibilities and cultures, according to Bozeman and Gaughan (2011, cited in Yeaman 2021), are important reasons why administrators discover that engagement approaches do not necessarily achieve the same benefits for both groups. As a result, the organisational

and interpersonal mechanisms that must exist to encourage EE in different groups differ (Bozeman and Gaughan 2011, cited in Yeaman 2021).

While EE has received more academic attention in the previous three decades, there appears to be a paucity of literature on the topic in the public sector, particularly higher education (Byrne and MacDonagh, 2017). The focus of the material that does exist has been criticised by several scholars. Most of the literature on engagement focuses on teacher engagement rather than EE. In their study on Irish faculty engagement, Byrne and MacDonagh (2017) asserted that a disproportionate amount of research has focused on primary and secondary educators, whereas research on higher education has tended to focus on South African higher education. The fact that engagement-focused literature tends to be student-centric and ignores the climate among professors or staff has also been criticised (Troy, 2013 cited in Yeaman, 2021). While there is little existing literature on the subject, the material that does exist underlines the challenges that institutions face in terms of EE, both faculty and staff. While there are some similarities, due to the varied cultures in which professors and staff work, engagement determinants for the two groups are frequently different (Bozeman and Gaughan, 2011 cited in Yeaman 2021).

Several variables may contribute to problems with faculty engagement. Troy (2013, cited in Yeaman 2021), in his research on community college faculty engagement, found that diminishing faculty engagement was linked to feelings of a lack of autonomy, job insignificance, or alienation from larger outcomes. While most of his claims are supported by other studies, the absence of autonomy is one that is frequently addressed (Bozeman and Gaughan 2011, cited in Yeaman 2021; Byrne and MacDonagh 2017). According to Byrne and MacDonagh (2017), public-sector employees, more so than private-sector employees, struggle to gain autonomy because local, provincial, and national oversight restricts the amount of latitude institutions, and their employees have in affecting change that could lead to increased engagement.

While there is little research on what factors impact faculty (academic) engagement, there is even less on what factors drive higher education staff engagement. Non-academic personnel who are responsible for a university's day-to-day operations are referred to as professional staff (Curran and Prottas, 2017 cited in Yeaman, 2021). Because professional staff have a very different job to faculty (academic) staff members, the elements that influence their degree of engagement are different. Few administrators enjoy the same opportunities as academics in being able to stay in their jobs while advancing with greater pay and status as they go through the ranks (from assistant to associate to full professor) (Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser 2000, cited in Yeaman 2021). In their study of work engagement and job satisfaction among employees, Hermesen and Rosser (2008, cited in Yeaman 2021) evaluated a wide range of parameters. They discovered that enhanced engagement is linked to several different but related elements through their research. Employee engagement is influenced by work-life balance, as well as the level of autonomy and control they feel they have over their work (Hermesen and Rosser 2008 cited in Yeaman 2021). While the number of higher education staff personnel is expanding and they are working in a more competitive environment, research shows that resources are becoming increasingly scarce (Curran and Prottas 2017; Hermesen and Rosser 2008, cited in Yeaman 2021). Mid-level administrators, for example, are assigned to positions responsible for strategic objectives. However, they are frequently denied the authority to make critical decisions affecting those results. This leaves key personnel feeling powerless and not in control (Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser 2000, cited in Yeaman, 2021). According to the JD-R model, this could lead to a culture of disengagement among employees and staff (Byrne and MacDonagh, 2017).

The work of academic staff in the higher education sector has historically been seen as a high-job-satisfaction, low-strain vocation, but new evidence reveals that burnout and other types of psychological strain have grown more common among academic staff (Mudrak, *et. al.* 2018, cited in Theron, 2022: 3). Today's academics must contend with a demanding and frequently conflicting work environment while managing expectations that include juggling managerial and entrepreneurial skills

with academic excellence, delivering excellent lectures to large classes, and publishing novel research quickly. Interestingly, though, Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijer (2014) suggest that despite extensive grievances about stresses and strains, many academics are still relatively engaged in their work and find it both challenging and intrinsically motivating. In addition, they also derive an identity from their work. Most academics do agree that there are times when they are operating “in the zone”. This is when time is suspended, and they have an intense task focus and positive emotions as well as high levels of enthusiasm (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijer 2014: 39).

However, in addition to stress, dealing with these complicated obligations identified above on a daily basis, and for an extended length of time, can definitely result in burnout and disengagement from work. This is a problem because, according to Mudrak *et al.* (2018, cited in Theron 2022), academic professionals who are burnt out, risk not only harming their physical and mental health, but also endangering the teaching environment, students' satisfaction, and their ability to meet the needs of students, because they perceive that their self-efficacy has decreased. Additionally, academic careers have become less appealing due to the harmful effects of burnout on academic employees, including dealing with deteriorating research and teaching performance, drug and alcohol misuse, and declining physical and mental health (Barkhuizen 2005, cited in Theron, 2022: 3).

The demands of academic work have increased significantly, and research indicates that academic staff members continue to experience burnout as a result of the different responsibilities placed on them in the higher education sector. In addition to meeting the expectations of students and their parents, dealing with instructional dissent (student disagreements and complaints regarding instructional issues), managing courses, counselling students, and planning departmental activities; academic staff are frequently expected to attend to administrative tasks like paperwork, planning multiple academic activities for research and teaching projects, and following and preparing curricula (Mohammed, Suleyman and Taylan 2020,

cited in Theron 2022: 4). Furthermore, although academic personnel are expected to take on a variety of duties, they also face surprising resource shortages in a setting where job demands are rising (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014: 322).

A wealth of data points to the transformation of HEIs into generally stressful workplaces due to job instability, faculty competition, and increased job demands, such as burdensome paperwork and expectations to acquire external financing and establish linkages to industry. At the same time, the professional autonomy, societal standing, and collegial support that were formerly the key benefits of the academic career appear to be fading. Additionally, despite the fact that professional development for academic staff has been emphasised by numerous colleges and universities across the globe, staff find it a challenge to partake in these endeavours due to their heavy workloads that occur on a day-to-day basis. This includes, making oneself available to students, working on committees and clubs as well as conducting research and publishing. This limits their potential to learn more and develop their teaching abilities. Additionally, academic staff members who want tenure or permanent contracts are required to spend a considerable amount of time researching, writing, and publishing for the institution. As a result, they have very little time to devote to developing their adult learning strategy or new teaching tactics (Khan 2012, cited in Theron 2022: 4). Rocha, De Jesus, Marziale, Henriques, Maroco and Campos, 2020, cited in Theron 2022: 5) identify disputes at work, aggressive behaviour from students, along with learning challenges, huge classrooms, little social acknowledgment, and job pressure as the main stressful elements that cause academic staff burnout.

The authors go on to claim that academic staff members become emotionally and physically exhausted as a result of HEIs' reactions to these job expectations and the rapidly deteriorating work environment. The work-life balance of academic personnel is frequently hampered by long working hours, poor pay, high job intensity, time pressure, and less clarity of role expectations, to name a few more detrimental factors (Rocha *et al.*, 2020, cited in Theron 2022). Furthermore, in addition to their

primary teaching duties, lecturers are also required to take a number of other steps to guarantee successful knowledge transfer and complete student comprehension (Chen, Liu, Pang, Liu, Fang, Wen, Chen, Xie, Zhang, Zhao and Gu 2020, cited in Theron 2022: 5).

Numerous studies have examined the stress levels of academics and discovered that HEIs frequently give in to pressure to increase the workload demands on academic staff as a result of the rising pressure to publish and seek research funding. As a result, higher education employment is no longer seen as a low-stress occupation (Serhan and Houjeir 2020, cited in Theron 2022).

Governments frequently fund HEIs to offer top-notch instruction, so it makes sense that students and their parents would want to enrol in a tertiary institution that is renowned for its research endeavours and instruction standards that will enhance the educational experience. Additionally, tertiary education institutions frequently seek to increase knowledge and exposure by publishing to improve teaching quality. Various faculties try to differentiate themselves from their competitors by trying to stand out in the crowd and as a result, becoming known as leaders in their field. Academic staff in these faculties need to be both active researchers and instructors in order to receive the international recognition the universities require. Academic personnel therefore confront a "publish or perish" reality because of institutional pressure to generate intellectual work as well as the need to stay current in their disciplines. Not unexpectedly, academic weariness appears to have gotten worse over time due to the pressure to publish and the demanding course load requirements (Serhan and Houjeir 2020, cited in Theron 2022: 5).

2.2.10.2 National

The South African higher education system has undergone enormous changes since the start of the new democracy in 1994 because of the economic and social upheavals brought on by the end of apartheid. Not only has the South African

workforce undergone significant change, but South African HEIs have also encountered a confluence of difficult changes that have challenged their organisational structures, authority, mandates, and traditional practices to move away from inherited apartheid practices (Van den Berg *et al.* 2009, cited in Theron 2022: 4). The post-apartheid government of South Africa is still working to undo the effects of the apartheid era to move closer to a democratic society. One of the areas that has experienced significant reorganisation, is that of the higher education sector where there were a number of aspects that required remediation (Coetzee and Rothmann 2005: 24).

HEIs have seen a dramatic increase in the number of students entering the field as a result of the government's efforts to address past imbalances. These students require a significant amount of academic attention because of their different backgrounds and individual skills, attitudes, values and demands (Engle 2012, cited in Theron 2022: 3). Additionally, the introduction of various mechanisms and policies aimed at redress at different levels, the easing of access to higher education for underprepared students from under-resourced academic and socio-economic settings, advancements in communication and information technology, and globalisation, have all significantly influenced the changing landscape of higher education. Furthermore, the South African government has placed strategies in place to develop a knowledge-based economy, which places pressure on tertiary education institutions to conduct high-quality research and publish in prestigious international journals (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014: 322). Therefore, HEIs are under continuous pressure to create competitive advantages in the fight to succeed in such an environment. Serhan and Houjeir (2020, cited in Theron 2022: 3) claim that competition among institutions has a knock-on effect on their academic staff because it frequently results in an increase in student enrolment, which increases the teaching load and reduces resources, including both financial and non-financial ones like human capital investment and research funding. According to Serhan and Houjeir (2020 cited in Theron, 2022: 3), this imbalance frequently causes academic staff burnout.

Four significant trends that occurred in the post-apartheid era created unsettling conditions for South African HEIs. Firstly, schools' admission standards, financial aid rules, and language policies were changed to promote and enable the development of underprivileged students. The aim at expansion to move students from elite, smaller systems to institutions with large student populations substantially influenced the sector's quick expansion and changing environment in South Africa (Van den Berg, Manias and Burger 2009, cited in Theron 2022: 2). Higher education institutions not only saw a marked increase in their student-staff ratio as a result, but academic staff members also had to manage a wider variety of students who were more culturally diverse than the students they had previously worked with. Secondly, several professions acknowledged a rising need for knowledge and abilities that go beyond what secondary education can supply. Knowledge-intensive industries have been evolving more quickly than people's ability to modify their skill sets frequently. As a result, organisations that are in desperate need of highly educated and competent people frequently place a heavy burden on tertiary education institutions to supply current information. Thirdly, tertiary education institutions became more and more reliant on the commercial and public sectors to help them solve difficulties across a broad spectrum (Theron 2022: 3). Inevitably, academic staff were and still are expected to deliver excellent instruction to ensure highly skilled individuals, to conduct the necessary research, and to produce pertinent and helpful knowledge to prepare a developing society to participate in a rapidly changing national and international context. Fourthly, HEIs need to become globally competitive because the globalisation of knowledge is expanding at an accelerated rate. As a result, academics are expected to take on tasks other than their conventional ones of conducting research and imparting knowledge, such as those of managers, facilitators, marketers, and entrepreneurs.

While some may view these additional responsibilities as a positive diversification of their work, it is nearly certain that the ongoing pressures placed on academic personnel will have a negative impact on their well-being (Barkhuizen 2005, cited in Theron 2022: 3). All things considered, staff employed at tertiary education

institutions face numerous obstacles because of the reorganisation of the South African higher education sector. Peer support within the institution faces challenges like resistance, diversity, and equity; organisational support, cultural norms, and value systems must change continuously; new organisational cultures must be introduced; and organisational climates are inexorably and continuously modified by ongoing change (Coetzee and Rothmann 2005, cited in Theron 2022). These trends paint a clear image of the modern South African higher education landscape, which appears to be more demanding on academic staff than at any other time.

According to Awang, Kutty and Ahmad (2014: 29 cited in Bhana 2018: 84), HE refers to post-secondary institutions like universities or colleges that offer qualifications like national diplomas and various levels of undergraduate and post-graduate degrees. Twenty-one public universities, fifteen technikons, 120 colleges of education, 24 nursing schools, and 11 agricultural institutions made up the South African HE sectors in 1994. By 2001, most colleges had either closed or been integrated into universities and technikons (Badat 2010: 12 cited in Bhana, 2018). Zeghers (2016: 2 cited in Bhana 2018) asserts that because technikons and universities had different major focuses before the mergers, it may have been detrimental to both institutions. There are currently 26 public HEIs in South Africa, and they all compete for the best staff and students. According to Writer (2015: 1, cited in Bhana 2018), South African HEIs have been divided into the following groups: (1) Six comprehensive universities that offer a synthesis of academic and vocational qualifications; (2) nine universities of technology that focus on employment-oriented education; and (3) eleven traditional universities that concentrate on theoretically oriented university degrees. Additionally, over the past few years, the student population at South African HEIs has changed from being predominately white to being predominately black. As a result, HEIs have come under pressure from the government to switch the languages of instruction to improve access for black students who do not understand Afrikaans. Therefore, while having insufficient resources to handle the demands brought on by such transformation, academics' workload has increased (Coetzee and Rothmann 2005, cited in Theron 2022: 6).

According to Adekola (2012, cited in Theron 2022), the increased workloads amongst HE staff have created a feeling of being overworked which leads to lower levels of engagement. Furthermore, Minter (2009 cited in Theron 2022) also contends that lower levels of engagement manifest in reduced interest and participation in institutional activities. A further challenge for HE staff is the relaxation of entrance requirements resulting in students being wholly unprepared for university as they lack basic skills such as math, speaking, writing, problem-solving and critical thinking. This, in turn leads to high failure rates and subsequent institutional pressure on academics to magically improve students' skills in a short period of time. The bureaucratic and rigid nature of HEIs in South Africa further serves to compound the problem as academics are not always allowed to be innovative in addressing such challenges (Minter 2009 cited in Theron 2022).

Van den Berg *et al.* (2009, cited in Theron 2022) also highlight that besides excessive workloads, academic employees are often forced to deal with intense time constraints and increased interference of their work life with their personal lives, leading to subsequent burnout. Moreover, Mohammed, Suleyman and Taylan (2020 cited in Theron, 2022) show that South African academics' depersonalisation and exhaustion—two key components of burnout—are significantly influenced by the larger number of students taught in today's HEIs. These researchers also discovered that academic personnel frequently struggle to balance and manage the competing demands of service, research, and teaching, which results in much greater levels of emotional weariness (a core element of burnout). In an effort to identify the causes and harmful effects of burnout among academics working in universities, Khan (2012 cited in Theron, 2022) shows that burnout has an impact on academics' productivity by affecting their working performance as well as their mental and physical health. Additionally, he discovered that academic employees that are burned out have higher turnover intentions, reduced commitment, subpar performance, and lower job satisfaction, which has a negative impact on their institutions. In contrast to Mohammed *et al.*'s. (2020) findings, Khan (2012, cited in Theron 2022) reports high rates of emotional exhaustion, lack of personal

accomplishment, and apathy toward student issues among burnt out academic staff. Burnout among academic staff also results in declining enthusiasm for socializing with co-workers or students, declining interest in meetings, a lack of desire and passion for lecturing, and absenteeism.

Academic staff members frequently become trapped in a burnout cycle in the higher education environment depicted above, which frequently results in dysfunctional professional behaviours such as subpar performance in student care, research, service, teaching, and even interpersonal relationships with co-workers and family (Minter 2009, cited in Theron 2022). Burnout reduces academic productivity in a way that threatens the human and reputational capital of the institution, and emotionally and physically exhausted academics typically exhibit lower motivation to conduct research, so it is obvious that burnt out academics present HEIs with unavoidable risks (Serhan and Houjeir 2020, cited in Theron 2022).

Many academics appear to be involved in their work and can experience a large amount of intrinsic motivation, identity, and challenge from their profession, despite widespread complaints about work-related strains and stressors (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014). Despite the constant pressures of the workplace, Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2006) discovered that certain academics exhibit high levels of enthusiasm, along with an intense task focus and positive emotions. Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2006) found that 40% of the academic staff respondents in their study found their work rewarding, enjoyable, and intrinsically motivating despite a lack of support, work overload, and long working hours. This is despite the fact that numerous studies have found high levels of burnout among academic staff. The information mentioned above justifies the need for additional research into the disparity between EE and burnout among academic staff in HEIs. After all, given that higher education institutions are responsible for the education of the majority of society's leaders, as well as the fact that they play an indispensable role in the reconstruction of South Africa, the design of knowledge for future skills development, and the educational and social upliftment of South Africans, it is imperative to

prioritise and support their human capital (Coetzee and Rothmann 2014 cited in Theron 2022: 8).

2.2.10.3 Local

There are currently two UOTs operating in Kwazulu Natal, namely the Durban University of Technology (DUT) and Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT). These institutions draw most of their students from the surrounding areas within KZN, in particular the rural areas of the province. According to the information extracted from their respective websites, the DUT has approximately 33 000 (Durban University of Technology, n.d) and MUT approximately 14 500 (Mangosuthu University of Technology, 2023) registered students. The 2002 merger of Technikon Natal and M. L. Sultan Technikon produced the DUT, which was formerly known as the Durban Institute of Technology (DIT) (Ngcamu and Teferra 2015 cited in Ngcobo, 2021). The merger of these institutions improved their cost efficiency, reducing the overlap of HEIs (Daweti 2015; Ngcamu and Teferra 2015, cited in Ngcobo 2021), and raised their level of financial leverage. Due to legislative changes in the HE sector, the Durban Institute of Technology (DIT) was renamed the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in 2005. Low student throughput, declining state support, a lack of postgraduate policies to assist institutional programmes, and inadequate facilities have been demonstrated in studies to be the most frequent problems in South Africa's higher education sector (Pouris and Inglisi-Lotz 2014, cited in Ngcobo 2021), including UOTs such as DUT and MUT. These institutions therefore work to overcome the throughput challenges by developing new programme designs and boosting student enrolment plans.

South African higher education institutions (HEIs) such as the DUT and MUT, are increasingly having to deal with issues that have an impact on EE. In addition to labour and student unrests, these challenges also include rising job demands brought on by high student enrolments and low staffing levels (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014; Barkhuizen and Rothmann 2006; Bezuidenhout and Bezuidenhout 2014; Myburgh, Poggenpoel and Hastings-Tolsma 2017 cited in

Ndoro and Martins 2019). In the context of modern higher education, there is an increasing demand for empirical evidence regarding levels of EE most affected by these challenges (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and Van de Vijver 2014).

The two UOTs in KZN namely DUT and MUT, have in recent years, been faced with increased demands arising from changes in the social, political, and economic environment in South Africa. These changes have necessitated an extensive transformation of their entire systems (Barkhuizen, Rothmann and van de Vijver 2014; Moshoeu and Geldenhuys 2015; Pienaar and Bester 2009 cited in Ndoro and Martins 2019). For example, increasing work demands of staff with large class sizes, continuous student unrest, and the enrolment of underprepared students due to the weaknesses in the school education system, take-away from the quality of work-life of the institutions' staff. The competing work demands from seeking to provide a good education but with meagre resources creates role conflict for staff members; inhibiting positive levels of EE (Bezuidenhout and Bezuidenhout 2014, cited in Ndoro and Martins 2019).

An example of such challenges can be seen by the following events in 2019. On the eve of the commencement of the academic programme, there were calls for the entire shutdown of all four KZN universities namely: DUT, MUT, University of Zululand (Unizulu) and the University of Kwazulu Natal (UKZN). The demands related to National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) funding, as well as residence, and registration related issues. Protests were sporadic and violent, leading to massive disruption of the academic year including the death of a student and serious injury to a DUT staff member. The traumatic experience of the staff member disrupted her ability to work, to perform her other daily duties and to engage in satisfying personal and work relationships (Durban University of Technology 2019: 8).

Additional pressures on UoTs in the province include students' lack of financial resources and dependence on the government financial aid scheme (NSFAS) to

finance their academic studies both at undergraduate and post-graduate levels – attributed primarily to the fact that many students enrolled come from poor backgrounds with little or no access to financial resources for tertiary studies ; the #FeesMustFall movement which led to students’ expectations of “free higher education” and the option of choosing to study at any university, subsequently dealing a blow to the past competitive advantage of universities like the DUT – this posed a real threat to the institution’s capacity to attract top learners and meet its First Time Entering Students (FTEN) enrolment targets (Durban University of Technology 2019); the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to online teaching and learning which presented enormous challenges for students who were already underprepared for university life; the July 2021 riots in KZN and Gauteng which led to the disruption of the academic calendar, as well as the recent KZN floods in 2022 and 2023.

2.2.10.4 Higher education challenges during Covid-19

In addition to the above challenges, HEIs were forced to confront a global pandemic in 2019/2020. For instance, HEIs were abruptly obliged to switch from traditional face-to-face teaching settings to online teaching instructional models due to the unanticipated coronavirus outbreak in 2019 (COVID-19). While some academic staff members managed well, others battled technological issues, along with problems with their mental and physical health (Chen *et al.* 2020, cited in Theron 2022). This COVID-19-induced shift to online teaching created an urgent situation where many academic staff members had to adapt to presenting all courses exclusively online, thereby necessitating a learning environment that effectively supported students and allowed them to perform well at the same time (Daumiller, Rinas, Hein, Janke, Dickhauser and Dresel 2021, cited in Theron 2022: 7). Academic employees in HEIs were suddenly placed in an unexpected work setting and therefore had to quickly adjust to a novel environment with a variety of distinct stressors, thus increasing their chances of burnout. (Hadi, Bakker, and Hausser, 2021 cited in Theron, 2022). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic-related policy-imposed prohibition on travel

and unavoidable social contact affected not only the workplace but also disrupted people's normal leisure activities. Daumiller *et al.* (2021, cited in Theron 2022) recently examined the engagement and burnout risk of 80 academic staff members over the course of the semester before switching to online teaching as well as the first semester after online teaching was mandated. They discovered that higher levels of burnout and negative student evaluations of teaching quality were caused by employees' assessment of this transition as a threat.

Due to the widespread use of digital technologies for education over the past few decades, instructional techniques in higher education have undergone significant change. As a result, educational professionals working in this sector should be knowledgeable with digital technology. Nevertheless, prior to COVID-19, higher education instruction was mostly delivered in face-to-face settings with, at most, sporadic digital technology augmentation. In contrast, once the COVID-19 lockdown period began, instantaneous transfers from offline to online instruction became mandatory, thereby hastening the digitalisation of teaching in educational institutions. This then created a knock-on effect for the administrative and/or academic environment, as well as academic personnel who play important roles in online education (Theron 2022: 8).

Planning was impossible due to the unprecedented, unplanned physical closure of educational institutions in almost all countries at the start of the COVID-19 crisis, which necessitated a shift from face-to-face instruction to flipped classroom, online, or blended learning necessary. Today's academic staff in HEIs face numerous obstacles related to the demand to redesign teaching activities for their students, including doubt, fear, and frustration, as well as an increase in exam and test cheating, difficulties maintaining students' interest and time management, and difficulties maintaining a healthy work-life balance (Daumiller *et al.* 2021, cited in Theron 2022). Therefore, it is not surprising that academic staff members are experiencing increased stress and pressure because of COVID-19. Recent research supports the idea that COVID-19 has an unavoidable impact on academic staff

members' wellbeing because many of them perceive the situation as threatening and as a result experience resource constraints, ineffective coping strategies, increased anxiety, and consequently increased burnout (Chen *et al.* 2020 cited in Theron 2022).

2.2.11 Benefits of employee engagement in the higher education context

According to Saks (2006), the driving force behind the popularity of EE is that it has positive outcomes (benefits) for organisations. Saks (2006) confirmed the study by Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) of a strong connection between EE and business results. Although neither Kahn (1990) nor May, Gilson and Harter (2004) included outcomes and/or benefits in their studies, Kahn (1992) suggested that engagement leads to: (1) individual outcomes such as the quality of people's work and their own experiences of doing that work, and (2) organisational level outcomes such as growth and productivity of organisations (Saks 2006: 607).

"Work engagement is a positive experience in itself" (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002, cited in Wasilowski 2018: 9). "Employee engagement is a hard-nosed proposition that not only shows results but can be measured in costs of recruitment and employee output" (Johnson 2004, cited in Wasilowski 2018). As the last quotation implies, there are many benefits to investing in improving EE, and there is a good deal of agreement in the practitioner and academic literature on these benefits. As previously stated, these benefits can be roughly categorised into organisational outcomes (productivity, profitability, customer loyalty, employee retention, and security) and individual outcomes (enthusiasm, excellence, satisfaction, devotion, etc) (Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019: 70).

According to Seijts and Crim (2006, cited in Wasilowski 2018: 10), from an individual perspective, engagement may allow people to fully commit to their work, increasing self-efficacy and having a beneficial effect on their health and well-being. These factors in turn lead to improved employee support for the organisation. From an organisational perspective, (1) engaged employees are more likely to remain with

the organisation and “stick around” when the organisation is facing challenging times; (2) performance levels of engaged employees are 20 per cent better than their co-workers; (3) engaged employees are more eager to go the “extra mile” and to promote the organisation to others - OCB; (4) engagement can significantly affect an organisation's performance, boosting revenue through higher productivity, customer loyalty, more sales, or improved retention rates; and (5) in businesses and organisations that must adapt to shifting markets, engagement can increase organisational agility and increase the effectiveness of change-related efforts (Wasilowski, 2018: 10).

In addition, Harris (2018: 79) identifies five key benefits of EE: (1) job satisfaction for employees; (2) employee and career development; (3) OC (OC); (4) OCB; and (5) decreased employee turnover intention. Hayden (2019: 20) also confirmed at least three of these benefits discussed by Harris (2018) namely, job satisfaction, turnover retention, and OCB. Employees that are actively engaged are a company's greatest asset (Shoko 2014: 18). They work hard every day while striving to better themselves and the organisation as a whole. They are passionate about what they do and have a strong sense of loyalty to their employer. Employee engagement in public sector organisations enables them to meet strategic objectives and deliver timely services to citizens from staff who are highly regarded by their employers (Lavigna 2017, cited in Harris 2018: 79).

In order to accomplish their goals and enhance organisational performance tertiary institutions, like any other organisation, rely on their employees to energise the organisation's operations and affairs. These employees are the most significant and tangible assets in the organisation (Onyeizugbe and Orogbu 2015, cited in Anyalor, Nwali and Agbionu 2018: 70). It is well known that no university can grow beyond the quality of the teaching and non-teaching staff that constitute the human resources of that institution. This can be attributed to the fact that productivity depends on employee talent and devotion as well as attempts to increase the

sustainability of the organisation, which are frequently endorsed by management (Markos and Sridevi 2010, cited in Anyalor Nwali and Agbionu 2018: 70).

Subsequently, universities are focusing more on fostering engagement among their members due to increased competitive pressures in the higher education sector. Employee engagement is regarded as a key contributor to the success of the firm in today's cutthroat business environment (Dale Carnegie Training White Paper 2012, cited in Ahmed, 2018: 114). Employee engagement is therefore essential not only for ensuring employee performance, loyalty, satisfaction, and retention, but also graduates' satisfaction (Lockwood 2007, cited in Ahmed 2018: 114). Employee engagement is also regarded as a source of innovation and growth (Ghafoor, Qureshi, Khan, and Hijazi, 2011). It has been found to be among the most important determinants and predictors of success in universities (Ahmed, 2018: 114).

According to Wefald (2008, cited in Shuck 2010: 52), "research points to a reciprocal relationship between resources, engagement and positive outcomes" such as "increased productivity, satisfaction and reduced turnover". For example, when academics feel that their institution is concerned about their growth and well-being, they seek to fulfil their commitments to the organisation by increasing their engagement. In other words, academics tend to be more dedicated if they think their contributions to the organisation's success will result in a similar return from the institution. It will increase their research output and institutional profile if organisations help academics publish in prestigious journals, pay for the publication fees, and provide a way to view and download articles from closed-access publications (Anyalor, Nwali and Agbionu 2018: 74). This is likely to affect the levels of engagement of academics which in turn results in increased commitment and loyalty to the organisation. According to Rama (2009, cited in Anyalor, Nwali and Agbionu 2018: 74), when employees are more genuinely engaged and feel that their contributions are valued, they are less likely to leave the company.

A study by Azmy (2019) investigated the EE factors at an HEI in Indonesia. The author stated that EE increases employees' levels of commitment to, and involvement in, the organisation and its values; improves productivity and job performance; increases the "sense of responsibility" an employee has for their job; and provides a "positive response to business innovation" (Azmy 2019: 197). An engaged employee is "intellectually and psychologically committed" to the organisation. Such employees can be empowered to assist with achieving organisational goals (Ravikumar, 2013 cited in Azmy, 2019: 187). Since EE is determined by the provision of necessary resources to an employee, this can improve the achievement of business goals/targets. An engaged employee also has the requisite knowledge, skills and understanding to achieve organisational goals. Engaged employees are also capable of executing and implementing corporate business plans (Azmy 2019: 197). To preserve productivity and performance, HEIs must prioritise EE. One of the keys to the success of educational institutions is their ability to produce outstanding academic quality and services for the entire academic community (Azmy 2019: 187). This was confirmed in the results of the study by Azmy (2019: 197). Therefore, it is obvious from Azmy's (2019) research that EE can influence organisational productivity and performance. Academics are intellectual actors who can achieve the vision and mission of the HEI. In addition, engaged employees will also support the implementation of academic and non-academic services to students and academics (Azmy 2019).

Because of the advantages it brings to both people and organisations, EE is swiftly rising to the top of this period's research constructs. In terms of EE, consequences have reportedly received the least attention, according to Halbesleben (2010, cited in Harris 2018: 79). Employee engagement has been defined as a positive and fulfilling experience (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002), a passion for work (Truss *et al.*, 2013; Wellins and Concelman 2007), and a high motivational state (Colbert, Mount, Witt, Harter and Barrick 2004 cited in Harris 2018: 79). As a result, one might assume that any consequences associated with engagement would also be positive (Harris 2018).

2.3 WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Discussing conflict is simple. People tend to make broad generalisations without any fear of contradiction. Conflict, for instance, is considered negative when it harms others or is unhealthy, counterproductive or destructive. Additionally, it is claimed that it cannot be eliminated and that it is a necessary component of human contact (Anstey, Grogan and Ngcukaitobi 2011: 1). If we look at conflict positively, we may state that it creates opportunities and challenges and that it has many great characteristics that shouldn't be overshadowed by the negative perceptions of conflict. In fact, conflict is a necessary and inevitable component of every person's life (Yidana 2022). Everyone experiences conflict on a regular basis in their daily lives. It is impossible to stay out of conflicts with individuals or groups of people. (Anstey, Grogan and Ngcukaitobi 2011: 1).

There is a large body of research on conflict in the business world that comes from many different disciplines (Avgar 2017; Hurt and Welbourne 2018; Wall and Callister 1995; Wu, Zhao and Zuo 2017). Conflict types are constantly changing, and opinions on what it is and how to handle it vary greatly. Conflict is either seen as a process or as an occurrence by academics. Scholars agree that conflict is a largely inevitable element of social interactions and organisational life and that it is influenced by various factors that contribute to the complex conflict process (Holtzhausen 2020:101). Different forms of workplace conflict, such as strikes and other disruptive collective and workplace actions, reflect the fundamentally adversarial relationship between management and employees. Conflict is not static, and over time, it may take on various patterns or re-emerge at a later stage (Holtzhausen 2020: 102).

It is widely accepted and acknowledged by scholars that conflict is inherent in all human interaction (Hurt and Welbourne 2018; Van Kleef and Côté 2018 cited in Holtzhausen 2020). In addition, it is also accepted that conflict and co-operation co-exist in the employment relationship (Avgar 2017; Bélanger and Edwards 2007; Delaney and Godard 2001; Deutsch 1990; García, Munduate, Elgoibar, Wendt and

Euwema 2017; Gould and Desjardins 2014; Johnstone and Wilkinson 2017, cited in Holtzhausen 2020). Research shows that the management of this coexistence is critical, but that South Africa fails dismally in this regard (Holtzhausen 2020: 102).

Workplace conflict may take different forms such as labour-management conflict, as well as team or dyadic conflict. The latter forms of conflict are given significant attention by scholars because it is accepted that conflict cannot be ignored due to individual differences in personality traits. In other words, two or more people interacting in the workplace will automatically lead to conflict. Conflict may also be seen as functional (open to new ideas, commitment to resolution, respect, open communication and honesty, constructive) or dysfunctional (undesirable, negative, stressful, destructive). Even though conflict is frequently described as functional for organisations, the majority of advice relating to organisational conflict still falls under the spectrum of conflict reduction, resolution, or minimization (Rahim 2002: 206). According to Rahim (2002: 229), the study of organisational conflict has taken two paths. One series of studies looked at the level of conflict. These results imply that emotive conflicts may have to be minimised while moderate degrees of substantive conflict must be achieved by modifying the sources of conflict. Other studies have looked at the various dispute resolution styles of organisation members, such as integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromise. Depending on the situation, one method may be more appropriate than another for functional conflict management.

As a direct consequence of the above, employment relations practices are seen as playing a critical role in changing dysfunctional conflict into functional conflict, thereby reducing conflict to improve organisational effectiveness. Holtzhausen (2020) suggests that achieving a harmonious environment is critical to organisational effectiveness. However, HRM professionals tend to adopt a different approach when viewing conflict – avoid it at all costs as it negatively impacts on organisational effectiveness. This is a short-sighted approach and may contribute to further conflict which may become dysfunctional. There is, however, a grudging acceptance by

management of the existence of conflict and the central role it plays in organisations (Holtzhausen 2020).

With regards to engagement in the workplace, actively disengaged employees are more likely to create a disruptive environment at work and directly or indirectly contribute to dysfunctional conflict through their words, attitudes, and actions. They are seen as the proverbial 'bad apples' in the organisation and continuously undermine the efforts of other employees (Shoko 2014: 19). Shoko (2014: 8) also indicates that various signs of disengagement manifest in the workplace such as high labour turnover, low staff morale, social loafing and a lack of innovation and initiative amongst employees. It is therefore critical to develop an environment where workers are actively engaged as this may reduce the levels of conflict, more specifically, dysfunctional conflict.

2.3.1 Defining conflict

Conflict is a topic that, like many others in social science, lacks a universally agreed-upon definition. Different meanings have been provided by various authors. Conflict has many different definitions. According to earlier works (Litterer 1966), conflict is behaviour between two or more parties that is opposed to one another due to interactions with or actions of the other that may be the result of a perceived deprivation. Various conflict definitions incorporate some aspect of emotion, such as animosity or aggressive behaviour (Holtzhausen 2020: 104). For instance, conflict is described as a social condition or process that develops when two social beings are connected by at least one hostile contact or psychological response. Similar to this, conflict has been defined in terms of conflicting interests due to antecedents such as limited resources, opposing goals, obstructions to goal achievement, and consequent frustrations that lead to aggressive behaviour (Pondy 1967; Rahim, 2023). Similarly, conflict is also defined as divergent perspectives on who should be entitled to what (Abel 1982).

Pondy (1967: 298; Rahim, 2023), states that the term “conflict” is used in the literature to describe antecedent conditions such as scarcity of resources, policy differences, etcetera of conflict behaviour; affective states such as stress, tension, hostility, and anxiety, of the individuals involved; cognitive states of individuals such as their perception or awareness of conflict situations; and conflict behaviour ranging from passive resistance to overt aggression. He argues that trying to decide which of these is really conflict is a futile exercise. The problem, he says, is not to choose between these alternative conceptual definitions but, instead try to clarify their relationships. In other words, conflict can be more easily understood if it is regarded as a dynamic process.

Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1971: 139) defined the concept of conflict as: a “condition in which one identifiable group of human beings is engaged in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups because the groups are pursuing what are or appear to be incompatible goals.” Conflict develops through interactions between and among people, as Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff’s definition unequivocally demonstrates (Krueger, Diabes and Weingart, 2022). Another way to define conflict is to link it to competitive motives, which is purposefully interfering with someone else's objectives, as is the case when the term "conflict" is used in the context of industrial relations (Deutsch 1973; Thomas 1992; Tjosvold, Wong and Feng Chen 2014; Holtzhausen, 2020). Conflict may involve grievances and disputes between individuals or organisations, as well as their employers, irrespective of whether there are any unions present (Currie, Gormley, Roche and Teague 2017; Mills and Mene, 2020; Tirapani and Willmott, 2023).

Conflict is described by Wise (2000: 5, cited in Aminu and Marfo 2010: 33) as "two pieces of matter trying to occupy the same space at the same time." That is, disagreements can also arise between people who hold opposing views on the same issue. Conflict may arise, for instance, when two staff members compete to fill the empty job of manager or head of department at the same institution (Rahim, 2023; Kundi and Badar, 2021). Conflict is thought to have multiple levels and dimensions

and is often described on three separate levels in seminal and subsequent works on the subject, namely interpersonal, intergroup, and interorganisational conflict (Jehn 1997; Wall and Callister 1995; Holtzhausen, 2020; Pemb, Ikemefuna, Kibikiwa and Zoakah, 2023; Menchaca, 2024). According to Anstey (2006: 6), “(Social Conflict) exists in a relationship when parties believe that their aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously, or perceive a divergence in the values, needs or interests (latent conflict) and purposefully employ their power in an effort to eliminate, defeat, neutralise, or change each other to protect or further their interests in the interaction (manifest conflict).”

This definition highlights certain key elements of conflict: (1) conflict arises in a relationship between parties; (2) latent (hidden or dormant) conflict stems from the different perspectives or beliefs of the parties, therefore it relies on beliefs or perceptions; (3) these different beliefs or perceptions relate mainly to the impression that the parties' respective aspirations cannot be attained simultaneously or they have different needs, values and interests; (4) conflict arises only if the perspectives of the parties intersect at some point; and (5) for conflict to develop from latent to manifest, power needs to be added to the equation.

According to Mills and Mene (2020), Jones and George (2016) and Litterer (1966), organisational conflict is a state of discord in an organisation where goals are either not met or threatened due to conflicting individuals' or groups' goals, interests, or values, and where such ongoing conflicts endanger workers' wellbeing, individuality, security, or sense of belonging (LeBlanc, Gilin Oore and Axelrod 2014; Pemb, Ikemefuna, Kibikiwa, and Zoakah, 2023). However, scholars (Kabanoff 1985; Holtzhausen, 2020) contend that despite people's agreement on a shared objective and belief that they should cooperate, they still have trouble cooperating successfully since conflict mostly arises from people's routine attempts to collaborate and coordinate activities.

Conflict is typically described in terms of three fundamental elements: disagreement, interference, and negative emotions (Barki and Hartwick 2004; Solomon and Theiss, 2022). According to Pondy's seminal work from 1967, emotional states like stress and hostile behaviour, cognitive states like the perception of conflict, and conflicting behaviour should all be considered when thinking about conflict (for instance confrontation or explicit differences). Ma, Yang, Wang and Li (2017) examined the definitions of organisational conflict from 1957 to 2017 and agreed with Pondy (1967), and De Dreu and Gelfand (2008), that cognition, emotion, interest, and behaviour are the four main components of the idea of conflict. According to Ma *et al.* (2017), these four dimensions include behavioural conflict (associated with destructive confrontations, for example fist fighting, obstruction, backstabbing), interest-based conflict (related to limited resources, status and power, for example competition, discussion and communication), affective conflict (associated with emotional confrontations including negative emotional-related elements like sighing, annoyance, frustration, and rolling one's eyes), and cognitive conflict (associated with task-related confrontations such as differences in perspectives, ideas, and understandings related to tasks like discussions, communication and disagreement about work) (Rahim, 2023).

Additionally, some of the definitions of conflict place an emphasis on a circumstance or a particular event, while others see it as a process that develops through time (Coleman, Kugler, Bui-Wrzosinska, Nowak and Vallacher 2012, cited in Holtzhausen 2020; Hjerto and Kuvaas 2017; Folger, Poole and Stutman, 2024). Conflict, for instance, is defined as incompatible activities (such as opposing aims, values, or feelings) that arise when one person's behaviour obstructs or interferes with another person's actions or goals (Deutsch 1973; Tjosvold, Wong and Feng Chen 2014; Bohm, Rusch and Baron 2020). Deutsch (1973), Wall and Callister (1995), Folger, Poole and Stutman (2024) similar to De Dreu and Gelfand (2008), and Thomas (1976) define conflict as a process in which one party perceives that its interests or goals are negatively affected by another party, are being opposed by it, or are about to be negatively affected by it. They acknowledge that conflict may develop over time.

According to DeChurch, Mesmer-Magnus, and Doty (2013), it is a process rather than a one-time occurrence that results from perceived or actual differences in values, working methods, and thinking. This manifests as incompatibility, disagreements, or dissonance between or within social entities on various levels (individual, group, organisational) (Rahim, 2002; Rahim, 2023; Levi and Askay, 2025). Similarly, conflict is defined as a relational process that is impacted by the appearance of disagreeable behaviours or actions (Coleman *et al.* 2012).

Therefore, according to scholars, there is no single, accepted definition of conflict, but rather various categories of definitions that are recognized (Thomas 1992; Bohm, Rusch and Baron, 2020; Rahim, 2023; Folger, Poole and Stutman, 2024). The interdependence between the parties, which means that one has the capacity to affect the other party, the perception of incompatibility between the parties, and finally any contact between the disputing parties are three themes that are present in most definitions of conflict (Putnam and Poole 1987; Rahim, 2023). Therefore, conflict is defined for the purposes of this study as a process where one party believes that the interests of the other party are adversely affected or opposed as a result of perceived incompatibility (Wall and Callister 1995; Bohm, Rusch and Baron, 2020; Rahim, 2023; Folger, Poole and Stutman, 2024).

According to Holtzhausen (2020: 72), numerous international studies have been carried out on conflict and its management, but very little research has been conducted in South Africa (Havenga and Visagie, 2006; Mayer and Louw, 2009). A limited number of more recent conflict-related journal papers unique to the South African workplace were located after an extensive literature review. According to Holtzhausen (2020), these studies concentrate on conflict management and dispute resolution (Bendeman 2007; De Bruyn and Nienaber 2013; De Bruyn and Sotshononda 2017; Jantjies 2016; Nupen, 2013); labour unrest, industrial action, and workplace violence (Barchiesi 2016; Meyer and Abbott 2015; Mmanoko 2016); conflict prevention (Ganson 2014); interpersonal conflict handling styles (Havenga and Visagie 2006; Van Niekerk, De Klerk and Pires-Putter 2017); the influence of

demographic variables such as age, gender and culture in role-conflict, work-family conflict and conflict management (Plessis 2012; Geldenhuys and Henn 2017; Havenga 2008; Mayer, Surtee and Mahadevan 2018; Opie and Henn 2013); intergroup conflict and inequality (Kerr, Durrheim and Dixon 2017); as well as understanding organisational conflict and managerial challenges in South Africa (Madlala and Govender 2018; Mayer and Louw 2009, 2011; Mestry and Bosch 2013). Additional conflict studies at higher education institutions in S.A include those by Lukman (2021) which focused on conflict management at institutions of higher learning in S.A and Makamu (2022) which focused on conflict management at a South African Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) College. One can therefore conclude that there is a dearth of South African conflict management research in general. Holtzhausen's study in 2020 is the only research that considered the relationship dynamics of the specific set of constructs identified in a single study, with its primary focus being the construction of a psycho-social conflict management framework for South African based organisations.

2.3.2 Theoretical framework of conflict

The literature contains a number of conflict theories, models, and approaches, including those for addressing interpersonal conflicts and different kinds of conflicts (Avgar 2017; Erbert, 2014). However, no framework unifies the various theories of conflict dynamics (Avgar 2017; Coleman *et al.*, 2012; Thomas 1992; Tjosvold, Wong and Feng Chen 2014 cited in Holtzhausen 2020). As a result, conflict research findings are frequently contradictory, taken out of context, or overly focused on negative outcomes, impeding the possibility of effective conflict resolution and management (Avgar 2017; Coleman *et al.*, 2012). Conflict study is sometimes criticised for ignoring constraints and real-world situations (Coleman *et al.* 2012).

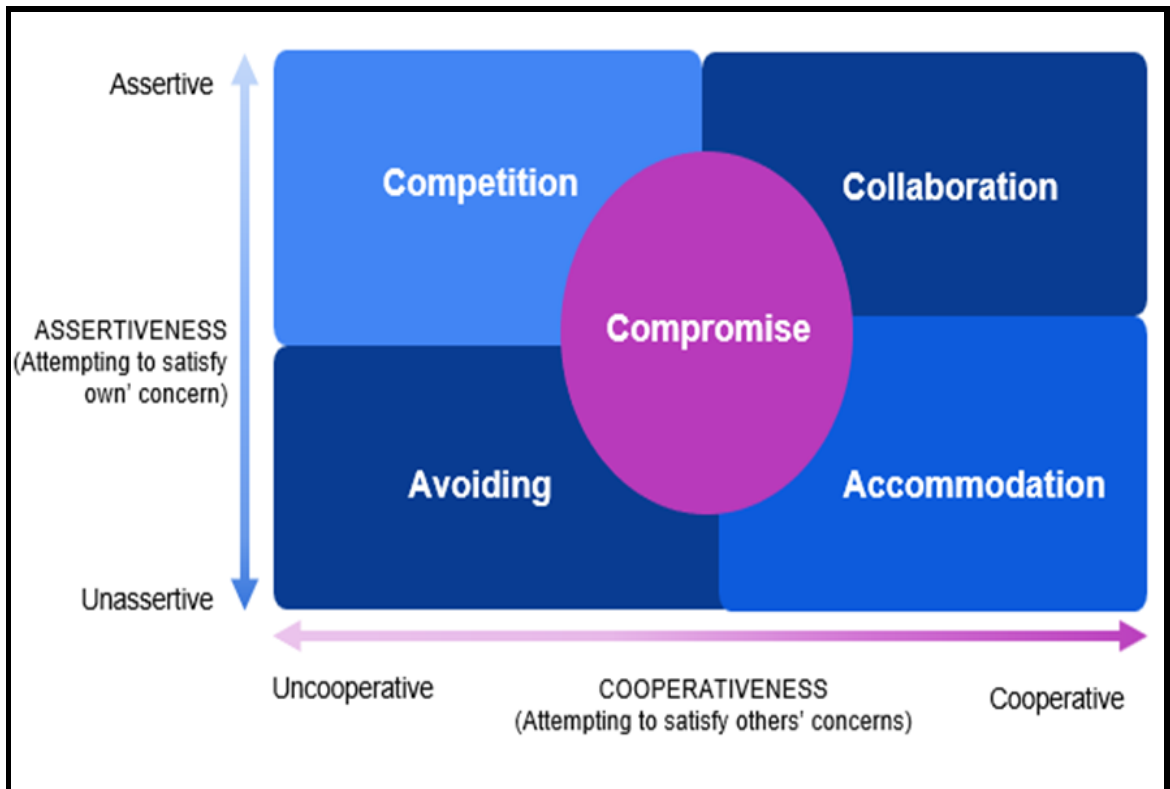
Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin (1992) conducted an extensive review of organisational conflict and conflict resolution and identified 44 major models in the area of conflict, negotiation, and third-party processes such as mediation and arbitration. The first

and most dominant paradigm is Pondy's Model of Organisational Conflict which is regarded as the origin of conflict studies. Treating the structural and personality characteristics that influence conflict, conflict processes, and conflict outcomes as components of a conflict episode, this model aimed to synthesise the links between them (Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin 1992). It suggests that a conflict episode may go through five stages namely, antecedent conditions, latent conflict, perceived conflict, manifest conflict and conflict aftermath. The core of the model is the antecedent conditions which include (i) competition over scarce resources, (ii) individual and/or subunit efforts to achieve autonomy and escape interdependence, and (iii) different individual and/or subunit goals (Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin 1992 cited in Jehn and Bendersky 2003). Most conflict researchers support this model and few have attempted to refine or build on it. Most of the literature focuses on Pondy's three conflict types and the causes of conflict. The premise of (i) resource conflict underlies intergroup conflict and labour relations models, while (ii) control conflicts relate to models of power use and power equalisation, and (iii) lateral conflicts which are often at the root of contemporary studies of behaviour in complex and dynamic organisations adapting to their environments. A search on Google Scholar indicated that Pondy's Model of Organisational Conflict is the most cited model in the literature (3056 citations as of September 2023). According to Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin (1992), other models have developed since Pondy's original model and include the Descriptive Models and Normative Models. These are not as frequently cited in the literature as Pondy's but add to the understanding of conflict.

Descriptive models include firstly, Rapoport's (1960) 'Fight' model which describes conflict that stems from interpersonal aggression and mostly applies to international arms races, community disputes, marital relations and intraorganisational conflict. Secondly, Rapoport's (1960) Debate model of conflict which focuses on cognitive conflict caused by different ideas, values, ideologies or policies. Several researchers have provided related models and studies. Thirdly, Filley (1975) expanded on Pondy's stages of conflict by adding to the list of antecedent conditions and including methods of conflict resolution such as problem solving. Additionally, Thibault and

Walker (1975) suggested a process stage when parties present evidence for their positions and a decision stage, where evidence is evaluated. This was also elaborated on by Sheppard (1984). Fourthly, dual concerns theory (Ruble and Thomas 1976) focused on conflict handling and conflict resolution styles and proposed that these styles varied along two opposite dimensions namely, assertiveness (concern for own interests) and cooperativeness (concern for others' interests). From these two dimensions they identified five conflict handling styles: avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration. The dual concern theory suggests that people faced with conflict display two basic concerns ranging from weak to strong-such as concern for their own outcomes or concern for the outcomes of others. Depending on the type of concern displayed, this leads to strategies that involve either avoidance, accommodation, competition, collaboration, or compromise. Coleman *et al.* (2012, as cited in Holtzhausen 2020) claim that the dual-concern theory was developed by a number of researchers who looked at various conflict resolution approaches (Blake and Mouton 1964; Pruitt and Rubin 1986; Rahim 1983; Thomas 1976; Van de Vliert and Kabanoff 1990). The work of Blake and Mouton (1964) was expanded by Thomas (1976) to a two-dimensional classification of conflict handling modes, with the first dimension consisting of competitive versus cooperative behaviour and the second dimension consisting of concern for the self (assertiveness) versus concern for others (cooperativeness) (Holtzhausen 2020: 147) (see Figure 2.9).

Figure 2.9: Modes of conflict handling

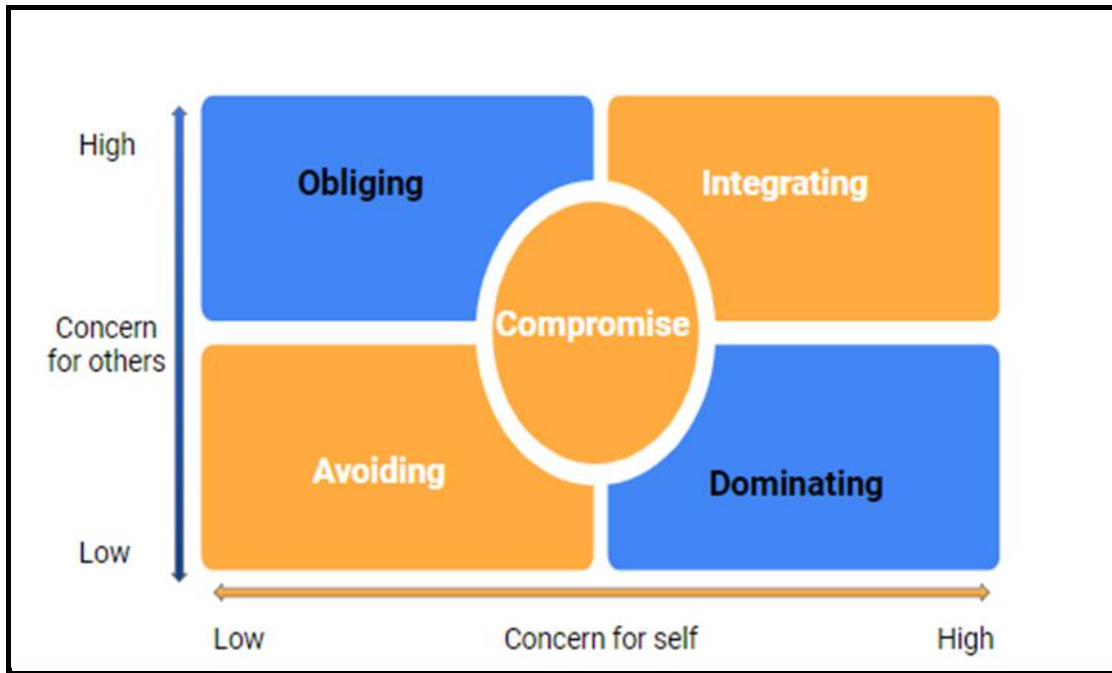


Source: Holtzhausen (2020) adapted from Kilmann and Thomas (1977) and Thomas (1976; 1992).

By dividing methods of conflict management into two main dimensions, namely concern for the self and concern for others, Rahim (1983) further expanded the dual concern theory (Blake and Mouton 1964; Rahim and Magner 1995a; Thomas 1976). The first dimension depicts how far (high or low) people will go to address their own issues, while the second dimension considers how far people will go to address the concerns of others. (Rahim 1983). There are five distinct interpersonal conflict management styles among managers, peers, and subordinates as a result of the combination of these two factors. A high level of concern for oneself and others can be seen in an integrating style, which involves working with opposing parties to get to a mutually acceptable collaborative outcome (Rahim and Magner 1995a). Low concern for oneself and great concern for others, as shown by minimising differences and highlighting similarities, is referred to as an obliging style. A win-lose approach to conflict is demonstrated by a dominating style, which demonstrates a strong concern for the self and a low concern for others. Avoiding conflict by withdrawing

from or avoiding any conflict situations demonstrates little regard for oneself and others. A compromise approach to conflict handling is characterised by a reasonable level of concern for both one-self and others (Rahim and Magner, 1995a). The choices are shown in Figure 2.10.

Figure 2.10: Styles for handling interpersonal conflict



Source: Holtzhausen (2020) Adapted from Rahim (1983)

Thomas (1992) later updated his two-dimensional model in light of newer research conducted by academics since it was first proposed. First, he claims that there is no consensus among academics regarding the precise nature of conflict handling modes, including tactics, behaviours, orientations, etcetera. According to Thomas (1992), the conflict handling strategies should actually be referred to as the parties' strategic intentions, specifically whether they are pursuing their own objectives or the objectives of the other parties. By isolating the parties' strategic aim from the causes of the modes, Thomas (1992) sets his version of the dual concern theory apart from that of other researchers like Blake and Mouton (1964) and Rahim (1983).

However, additional researchers (Pruitt and Kim 2004; Pruitt and Rubin 1986, cited in Holtzhausen 2020) have verified that the two dimensions explain or predict the occurrence of the five modes. Accordingly, the theory of dual concerns is also claimed to predict a theory of choice and strategy based on various conflicting motivating contexts (Pruitt and Kim 2004; Pruitt and Rubin 1986 cited in Holtzhausen 2020). The dual concern theory, according to Pruitt (1983), contends that one party's strategic decision may be impacted by getting the other party to care about one's results. Later studies revealed that the measurement tools of Kilmann and Thomas (1977) and Rahim (1983) are both only moderately valid in gauging the theory they are measuring (Van de Vliert and Kabanoff 1990). However, the work of Kilmann and Thomas (1977) has come under fire for failing to handle highly negative and destructive conditions of intense conflict that can result in behaviours of exclusion and sabotage (Trippe and Baumoel 2015).

Additionally, Thomas (1992) expanded on his original model (1976) by stating that two additional dimensions, namely the recipient's choice and the time period involved, should be taken into account. Choosing to improve the welfare of one party (a "partisan choice"), all parties (a "joint-welfare decision"), or the larger system to which the parties belong (a "systemic choice") are the three options available to the recipient (Thomas 1992: 270). Thomas (1992) points out that the larger systemic perspective will be most useful when managing conflict within an organisation. According to Thomas (1992), depending on whether the challenge is short-term or long-term, one should choose between contingency and collaboration theories of conflict management. Contingency conflict management theories are more realistic and frequently offer more immediate solutions. He gives the following scenario as an illustration: If parties lack the ability to solve problems, do not trust one another, or are under time constraints, competition or compromise will be better approaches to resolve the disagreement than attempting to work together (Thomas 1992). However, the contingency method proposes that there should be multiple conflict management options available to employees and managers so that the best alternative can be selected (Thomas 1976).

However, moving past these immediate problems necessitates a different strategy where structural variables are taken into account through a normative strategy characterised by intra-system collaboration that gives leadership and change processes a long-term focus (Thomas 1992). Successful conflict management occasionally demands a short-term pragmatic focus to identify what urgent action is required. However, in order to decide what needs to be done in the long run to achieve excellent goals, a visionary perspective is still required. For this type of improvement, visionary leadership, adjustments to organisational processes, shifts in organisational culture and norms are required (Thomas, 1992). According to Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin (1992), descriptive models have shaped the study of conflict. In conclusion, three key assumptions underlie the above descriptive models namely, (1) conflict originates from a variety of possible sources; (2) conflict follows a predictable course or pattern; and (3) conflict is manifested in many ways, which have both positive and negative consequences.

The primary criticism levelled at the dual concern theory is on its failure to distinguish between the skewness in power between the parties and how this would affect its predictions of strategy in a given setting (Coleman *et al.* 2012). Additionally, the inclusion of compromising as a method of resolving conflict has come under fire, with some arguing that it is a lazy approach to problem-solving intended to apathetically appease all interests and is comparable to cooperating (Pruitt 1983). Other academics such as Van de Vliert and Kabanoff (1990) dispute this idea, contending that compromise and collaboration are distinct behaviours even though the respective results of a settlement or a resolution may share some characteristics. Despite the criticisms stated above, the dual concern theory (Rahim 1983; 1995) has withstood the test of time and offered a means of incorporating many interpersonal conflict resolution styles. It helps one make a strategic decision about how to handle conflict that is motivated by both concern for the self and for others. Strong organisational leadership and a culture that supports managing conflict concerns, among other things, through encouraging employee voice, are required to promote

such a concern. Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin (1992) also confirm that this theory has withstood sustained empirical examination. A recent study by Lukman (2021) has also highlighted the dual concern theory as an important theory for understanding conflict in South African HEIs. The author suggests that the theory is highly appropriate in resolving conflicts between superiors and subordinates in the workplace.

Fifthly, Thomas' Structural Model (1976 cited in Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin 1992) shifted the focus towards conflict processes and presented structural determinants of conflict behaviour such as each party's behavioural predispositions, respective social pressures, respective conflict incentives and stakes in their relationship, and jointly applicable rules and procedures. Thomas (1976, 1992) identified two major conflict models - a process model and a structural model, where he distinguished between firstly, conflict processes and secondly, conflict structures in which the process occurs. The process model focuses on the internal dynamics of conflict episodes, particularly dyadic conflict (conflict between two or more parties). The model suggests that conflict moves through five key stages or phases: frustration ('conflicts appear to stem from one party's perception that another party frustrates the satisfaction of one of its concerns'); conceptualisation (the parties define the conflict in terms of their concerns and possible outcomes); behaviour (orientation to different modes of conflict handling, strategic objectives and tactics); interaction (the sequence of behaviours between conflicting parties that leads to conflict escalation or de-escalation, and the factors which encourage or discourage this spiralling) and outcomes (the short-term and long-term conflict aftermaths). Thomas (1976) also paid some brief attention to third party interventions which might affect or change the dynamics of the process mode (Holzhausen 2020: 148).

While the process model provided a framework for understanding discrete conflict episodes, the structural model was designed to understand those parameters which apply across conflict episodes. Thomas (1976, cited in Holzhausen 2020) postulated that the structural features shape the conflict process and promote (not

predict or determine) different conflict handling modes, which subsequently influence the conflict management process. The structural model was an effort to capture four sets of factors which affected dyadic interaction in conflict: (1) the individual predispositions of each party in the conflict (preferred conflict styles of parties); (2) the social (stakeholder) pressures on each party in conflict; (3) the incentive structure or “magnitude of the stakes” and conflict of interest in dispute; and (4) the framework of rules and procedures which governs or limits each party's conflict behaviours (Thomas 1976). Behavioural predispositions were envisioned to operate much like a “dominant style” or personality predisposition. Social pressures are similar to the constituent pressures described by Walton and McKersie (1965). Incentive structures include the general degree of compatibility or incompatibility between the parties, and the magnitude of the stakes, and the degree to which incentives are structured to reward cooperative or competitive behaviour. Finally, rules and procedures include the existence of decision rules by which the conflict can be resolved, how the parties negotiate, and whether various forms of third parties are available (Thomas 1976, cited in Holtzhausen 2020).

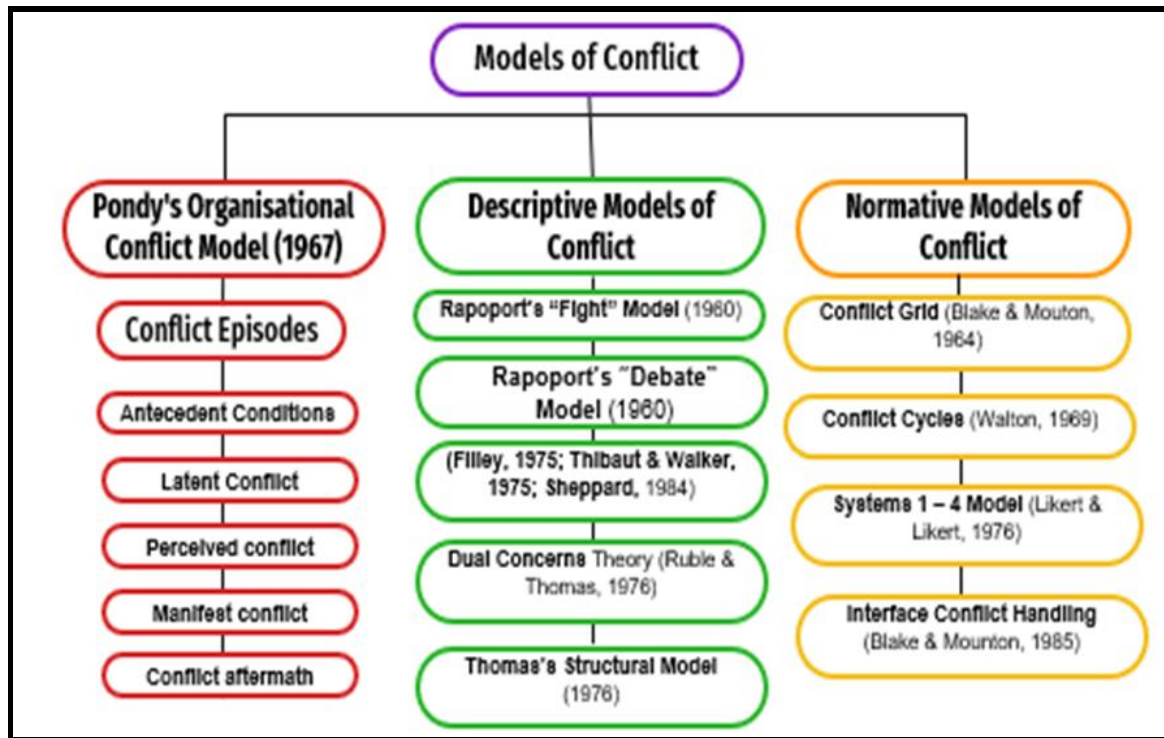
Subsequently, Thomas (1992) modified these process and structural models. He proposed that in the process model, emotions, along with normative and rational-economic thinking, jointly shape conflict intentions. The following functions of Thomas' (1992) structural model are influenced by these processes: (1) providing reasons and conditions for collaboration; (2) fostering universal support for collaboration; and (3) establishing the emotional conditions (supportive and nonthreatening) required for successful collaboration (Holtzhausen 2020: 149).

The final category of conflict models is the Normative models which occupy a prominent place in the literature, and all have important underlying assumptions. Firstly, the Conflict Grid (Blake and Mouton 1964; 1978) which highlights individual responses to conflict. According to the managerial grid developed by Blake and Mouton in 1964, management behaviour can be divided into five categories based on the manager's attitude of concern for either production (results) or people (valuing

people and maintaining relationships): problem-solving, smoothing, forcing, withdrawing, and compromise. On a nine-point dimensional scale, a one reflects the least amount of concern while a nine reflects the most amount of concern. This shows how managers would handle conflict. Secondly, Conflict Cycles (Walton 1969) which suggested that certain substantive and emotional issues lead to triggering events that cause conflict to manifest and involve conflict behaviour and consequences that then feed back into new or redefined issues. These in turn instigate additional conflict cycles.

Walton's model resembles Pondy's but differs in the following ways: (1) it is primarily concerned with interpersonal instead of intra-organisational conflict; (2) it is designed as a basis for intervention; and (3) it treats substantive and emotional issues as direct causes of behaviour. Thirdly, Likert and Likert's (1976) systems 1-4 model which delineated different responses to conflict in organisations and is similar to Blake and Mouton (1964). Finally, the *Interface Conflict Handling Style* of Blake and Mouton (1985) which is an action-oriented process model for conflict resolution between groups in organisations who work together frequently such as line and staff or labour and management. In conclusion, normative models involve an effort to describe conflict processes and dynamics. They also emphasise ways to change conflict behaviour towards productive ends. Key assumptions underlying the normative models include: (1) conflict and conflict-handling behaviour is adaptive; (2) conflict must be managed in respect of its consequences rather than its causes; and (3) collaborative behaviour is strongly desirable as a way to manage and resolve conflict. Figure 2.11 provides a summary of the key models of conflict discussed in Lewicki *et al.* (1992).

Figure 2.11: Models of conflict



Source: Lewicki, Weiss and Lewin (1992) (self-generated)

2.3.3 Higher education models of conflict

As indicated in an earlier discussion, Holtzhausen (2020:72) confirmed that numerous international studies have been carried out on conflict and the management thereof but also highlighted the dearth of South African research on the topic. Holtzhausen's (2020) study is one of the more recent and comprehensive studies done in the South African context. Earlier conflict studies in South Africa included Havenga and Visagie (2006) and Mayer and Louw (2009). The former focused on inter-personal conflict-handling styles in public and private sector organisations, while the latter study focused on organisational conflict in the SA automotive industry (private sector). An extensive review of the literature identified mostly journal articles (Havenga 2008; Bendeman 2007; Mayer and Louw 2009, 2011; Plessis 2012; De Bruyn and Nienaber 2013; Mestry and Bosch 2013; Nupen 2013; Opie and Henn 2013; Ganson 2014; Meyer and Abbott 2015; Mmanoko 2016;

Barchiesi 2016; Jantjies 2016; De Bruyn and Sotshononda 2017; Van Niekerk, De Klerk and Pires-Putter 2017; Geldenhuys and Henn 2017; Mayer, Surtee and Mahadevan 2018; Kerr, Durrheim and Dixon 2017; Madlala and Govender 2018; Holtzhausen 2020; Lukman 2021) and a dissertation (Makamu 2022) addressing the topic of conflict in SA. From these studies, seven focused on conflict in the public sector and only four of these (Mestry and Bosch 2013; Van Niekerk, De Klerk and Pires-Putter 2017; Lukman, 2021; and Makamu, 2022) narrowing their focus to conflict in the South African HE sector. Van Niekerk De Klerk and Pires-Putter's. (2017) study assessed the conflict management styles and work-related well-being among higher education employees. The studies of Van Niekerk, De Klerk and Pires-Putter (2017), Lukman (2021), and Makamu (2022), all applied the *Dual Concerns theory/model of conflict* (Ruble and Thomas, 1976; Thomas, 1976; Rahim, 1983, 2002; Thomas and Kilmann, 1977, 2008) concluding that the model is the most applicable model for conflict handling in the higher education sector.

A further review of the literature revealed international studies of conflict in the higher education sector including a study by Jafar, Malik and Karim (2022) focusing on workplace deviance using the *Normative Conflict Model*. Other studies within the higher education sector (Smith and Fredricks-Lowman 2020; James 2019; and Watson, Watson and Stanley 2018), also applied the *Dual Concerns theory* referencing theorists such as Blake and Mouton (1964; 1975), and Thomas and Kilmann (1974; 1977). This confirms from the review of the literature that the majority of studies within the higher education sector (both internationally and locally) focused on the application of the *Dual Concerns theory*.

In this research, conflict and the management thereof are considered through the perspective of the *Dual Concerns theory* (Rahim 1983; 1995; 2002). This theory has endured the test of time and allows for the integration of many interpersonal conflict handling styles into a single framework. It informs the strategic decision on how to manage conflict, based on concern for oneself and others. Fostering such a concern will necessitate strong leadership and an organisational culture conducive to the

management of conflict issues, including EE. These considerations influenced the chosen theory.

2.3.4 Roles of the various parties in the employment relationship (employee, employer and union)

The employment relationship may be described in various ways. There are however certain common features of the relationship that essentially exist within this relationship. It can therefore be defined as "... one in which one or more persons are employed by a private owner or work provider, by a large corporation, or in the public service" (Bendix 2019: 3). It is therefore necessary to identify the various parties in this relationship and the roles adopted by each, to discover how they interact and why they interact in that manner.

The key role-players in the relationship include employers, employees and the state/government. In addition, employees may be represented by trade unions while employers may also choose to register with employer organisations who act on their behalf in certain interactions. The duties and status of the parties to the employment relationship are, like those of many other relationships, largely determined by custom and tradition. Historically, the employer, owner, or entrepreneur plans, decides, directs, and controls, while the employee performs the owner's orders, participates in neither planning nor decision-making, and is unconcerned with the outcomes of his or her activities. Most parties to the employment relationship continue to accept and uphold these positions, which leads to a more or less ready acceptance of what may be loosely referred to as "employer prerogative." One may argue that the challenge to employer prerogative has recently gained momentum, but the very fact that it needs to be opposed shows that it already exists (Bendix 2021: 11). The positions assumed by the employer and employee are, in essence, unchanged from those held at the start of the 20th century, notwithstanding changes in societal values and institutions, personal views and ambitions, and organisational and ownership structures. The traditional role of the employer and the employer prerogative have

undoubtedly been recognised by managers of large firms who are also employees but who saw themselves as representatives of the employer (Bendix 2021: 11).

Without a doubt, changes in the definition of participants' roles and the erosion (or redefining) of employer (or management) prerogative have resulted from technical innovation, working from home, greater outsourcing, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers' or managers' unassailable authority to make decisions, to lead, and to control is being questioned or eliminated more frequently. This does not imply that there is no need for coordination, but rather that management is taking on a completely new meaning (Bendix 2021: 11).

The relationship between an employer organisation and a union or unions is also used to define the employment relationship, as is the relationship between management and the union. Yet, this does not account for a situation when there is no union or employer body. There is no existence for the word "union" apart from all of its participants. It does take on an apparently independent existence as a social structure, and it has considerable power within the relationship and within society. But the union will cease to exist if the grassroots support disappears. The work relationship may not necessarily require the presence of unions, despite the significant role they have played and continue to play in traditional employment relations. As it is, unions continue to play an important role in the South African system, serving as a spokesperson for the rights and interests of employees both in social and political organisations and at the bargaining table (Bendix 2021: 12).

2.3.4.1 Public sector

Several governmental services are provided by the public sector, which is the area of the economy that is under the authority of the national, provincial, and local governments. Most countries include services in this sector such as infrastructure, waste management, water management, health care, security services, and education, among others. Thus, it is the sector of the economy that is governed or

supported by the government. Hence, it refers to any type of government—local, municipal, provincial, or national—that is directly supported by tax revenue and is thus ultimately in charge of providing a wide range of services to the population (Morim, Inacio and Vieiria 2020)

Government, which is referred to as the public sector, is the single largest employer on the South African labour market. The public sector in South Africa consists of national, provincial, and local government, as well as state-owned enterprises (or public corporations) like Telkom, Eskom, Transnet, etcetera (Development Policy Research Unit 2017: 1). To a lesser extent, the public sector also includes public universities such as the Durban University of Technology, the University of KwaZulu Natal, the University of Cape Town, etcetera (Finnemore 2018: 197). The "public service" refers to people who work for government departments. Employees are employed at both the national and provincial levels in administrative, health, welfare, and education services as well as security services like the military, police, and prisons (Finnemore 2018: 197). Different metropolitan, local, and district councils represent the approximately 278 local government sites spread throughout South Africa. Additionally, a wide range of products and services are offered to the public via state-owned enterprises. The size of the public sector varies from country to country. In industrialised nations like the United States of America and Australia, the public sector accounts for 17 to 20% of all formal employment; in poor nations, however, that percentage rises to over 30% or more. Although public sector employment in South Africa has been steadily increasing and now accounts for 17,5% of all occupations, this figure is still within the range of industrialised nations. More people work in the public sector than in manufacturing. Apart from state-owned enterprises, the public sector employed approximately 1,304 million (full-time equivalent) South Africans in 2017 or 2,161 million listed employees (Finnemore 2018: 196). Employment within the South African public sector climbed from 1.9 million in March 2002 to 2.8 million in the first quarter of 2017. The sector's percentage of total employment increased over this period from 16.2% to 17.1%, which translates to an average annual growth rate of 2.4 percent vs 2.0 percent in

the private sector (Development Policy Research Unit 2017: 1). The government is a significant employer and has a significant impact on the labour market. In addition to absorbing labour, government compensation and benefit policies may affect how private sector firms behave as the two sectors compete for the available labour and skills.

In comparison to the private sector, employment in the public sector was once seen as being more stable and secure. Employees in the public sector were therefore not considered to need protection from retrenchments. However, in recent years many individuals have lost their jobs as a direct result of the restructuring and commercialisation of most state-owned businesses (SOEs) (Finnemore 2018: 197). With regard to labour rights, public sector employees were excluded from most of the labour laws, with the public sector having its own statutes and regulations covering the working relationship. Public sector unions did exist but, they did not have bargaining and dispute resolution rights such as the legal right to strike, etcetera. The situation changed in the 1990s as public servants were included in labour laws such as the Basic Conditions of Employment of 1997 and Labour Relations Act of 1995. The Labour Relations Act provides for the compulsory establishment of a public service bargaining council, with different chambers for the various public sector activities. This implies that government agents are required to bargain with public sector unions in respect of wages, conditions of employment and other matters (Bendix, 2019: 71).

Public universities such as the DUT also play a significant role in the field of labour relations through developing the next generation of leaders in business, politics, and labour, as well as by conducting policy-relevant research. However, because they are also organisations, they have the same problems with internal dynamics and labour relations as any company or government institution. Moreover, they do have one distinctive feature and that is the student body, which can mobilise around problems and add an often-surprising dynamic to relationships. A national policy decision in 2002 to reform the sector through a series of mergers and incorporations

aimed at condensing 36 universities and Technikons into 21 institutions was a major factor in the significant changes to higher education in South Africa in the 2000s (Finnemore 2018: 203).

In addition to the push to consolidate tertiary education facilities, these institutions have started outsourcing and downsizing their workforce to balance their budgets and concentrate on their primary activities, which are teaching and research. The increased proportion of students from low-income households and the failure to collect student fees have restricted income. These, together with a decline in state subsidies have presented extensive challenges for public universities in South Africa, thus increasing tensions between employees and management, with retrenchments and strikes popular mechanisms used to address the differences between the various parties (Finnemore 2018: 203).

2.3.4.2 Private sector

In economics, the term "private sector" refers to the part of the economy that is owned and run by private individuals or businesses. Organisations in the private sector are typically corporations or businesses that aim to earn a profit from their operations. As a result, it is a sector of the economy that is not administered or controlled by governmental institutions or groups. The retail, finance, construction, news media, manufacturing, hotel, and other private sector industries in South Africa are only a few examples. There are several types of private sector businesses such as sole proprietorships, small and medium-sized businesses, large corporations, and multinational corporations (Lutkevich 2022).

The private sector is essential to the economy because it fosters job growth, produces goods, and services, and creates jobs. For governments, it is a significant source of tax revenue. Businesses contribute to the funding of public services and allow governments to make investments in infrastructure and other significant initiatives by paying taxes. Innovation is largely driven by the private sector. Private

enterprises make investments in research and development, which produces innovative goods and services that advance society and the economy. One example is the invention of the iPhone, which completely changed how people communicate and go about their daily lives (Lutkevich 2022).

Historically, the employment relationship within the private sector was treated differently to that of the public sector. As indicated above, the rights of employees in the public sector were severely restricted in terms of the right to strike and bargain. Private sector organisations focus on generating profits and employees in this sector attempt to achieve economic gains at the expense of shareholders (Finnemore 2018: 197). This differs from employees in the public sector where economic gains in wages and conditions of employment impact directly on taxes. The private sector is driven by profit while the public sector exists to provide essential public services to citizens. Private sector employees generally receive public support for strike action as opposed to public sector employees who are portrayed negatively in the media and do not receive public support for their actions. Although the above conditions do still exist, the differences in employment relations in the public and private sector are not as significant as before (Finnemore 2018: 197).

2.3.5 Challenges with managing workplace conflict

Effective managers recognise the value of conflict resolution skills and consistently exhibit them at work. These, however, are not without challenges. Some of these challenges include: (1) parties to a conflict may be uncomfortable with confrontation and therefore choose to ignore it. This may not be serious in the case of minor conflicts that will dissipate on their own, but larger conflicts demand attention and constructive intervention; (2) the contagious nature of conflict is such that the stress of dealing with it may spread through the whole department, work unit or entire organisation; (3) individual pride may be an obstacle; for example, where a written apology is what is required to resolve a conflict, an HOD may find it difficult to apologise to a security guard or departmental secretary due to issues of power and

authority; (4) conflict may become personalised due to the “I’ve been here for a long time” syndrome; (5) there is also the problem of dealing with difficult people, those who are just not prepared for any kind of peaceful resolution which falls short of what they desire; (6) conflicts are all too frequently seen by those involved as “battles” in which one side must prevail and the other must lose. Conflict in the workplace defies this assumption. Organisational conflict typically results in a range of outcomes, where each side gains something. Compromise is necessary, but it is only feasible if there is a strong foundation of good will and respect for one another, (7) not all conflicts can be resolved; there are instances when people (or groups or departments) are just unable to come to a consensus; finding a means to coexist with disagreement is the next step. (Aminu and Marfo 2010: 43; Thompson 2022: 1).

2.3.6 The problems with failing to address workplace conflict

Conflict that remains unresolved has numerous negative financial and human costs. Conflict can result in tension, low morale, missed deadlines, low trust, low self-confidence, absenteeism, communication issues, and legal action (Buss 2009, cited in Riaz and Junaid 2011). According to Levine (1998, cited in Riaz and Junaid 2011), the costs of conflict include: *direct costs*, which includes the fees of lawyers and other experts; *productivity costs*, which includes the value of wasted time and opportunity cost; *continuity costs*, which includes the loss of an ongoing relationship; and *emotional cost*, which includes the suffering caused by emotions. Dana (2001, cited in Riaz and Junaid 2011) highlighted eight hidden costs of conflict: time wastage, poor quality decision-making, critical skills loss, restructuring inefficiencies, decreased job motivation, disruption, absenteeism, and health costs.

According to Katz (2007: 152-158), the consequences of unresolved conflict can be divided into two categories: indirect and direct. The direct consequence of unresolved conflict is a breakdown in communication between the staff. Appropriate communication among team members is well acknowledged in some of the safety-critical industries. (Davies 2005, cited in Huan and Yazdanifard 2012). Conflict can

also affect commitment and absenteeism. Affective commitment is defined as the employee's positive emotional attachment to the organisation. Linked with the social exchange principle (Shore, Tetrick, Lynch and Barksdale 2006), employees who have strong affective commitment develop an internal strength and encouragement focus, with the aim of achieving the maximum desired level of success under the terms of the contract (Luchak and Gellatly 2007). If affective commitment is low, employees may terminate their contracts, although absenteeism might be an option to resign from doing work while providing workers with a mechanism to express their disagreement with dissatisfactory circumstances in the organisation (Gaziel 2004). Specifically, an integrative conflict strategy can be seen as a form of leadership (Lorenzi 2004) by which leaders focus on the desires of a group instead of focusing on their own limitations and personal interests. Supervisors that implement an integrative conflict strategy give space to their employees' anxieties and make every effort to satisfy them. This integrative conflict strategy may be seen as a form of transformational leadership, given that its importance is associated with the leader's sense of social responsibility and collective interests rather than with self-interest (House and Aditya 1997). If leaders can identify a subordinate's needs, such transformational leaders can motivate them to get more involved in their jobs, leading to higher levels of OC and engagement (Walumbwa and Lawler 2003).

2.3.7 Employee engagement and conflict

Holtzhausen (2020: 163) states that a limited amount of research studies have investigated the significance of EE and conflict management. Employee engagement, which denotes a trusting relationship between the role players, is frequently used as a gauge of Employee Relations effectiveness (CIPD 2012; Emmott 2015; Currie *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, there is a strong connection between EE, conflict resolution, and a supportive organisational culture (Emmott, 2015). According to Currie *et al.* (2017), preventing conflict is a crucial component of conflict management, and considering the psychological alignment between employees and their organisations promotes better alignment with the objectives, vision, and

mission of their place of employment. Thus, OCB is encouraged (Currie *et al.*, 2017), and workplace conflict is perceived as impeding these objectives (Purcell 2014). However, research has shown that while EE helps to reduce conflict, it cannot entirely eradicate conflict (Soieb, Othman and D'Silva 2013). Nevertheless, many studies have looked at the impact of conflict on workplace well-being, a notion believed to include engagement and burnout (Bakker and Albrecht 2018; Rothmann 2008). Burnout has two components, namely, exhaustion and disengagement, and is frequently seen as the antithesis of engagement (Bakker and Demerouti 2017; González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker and Lloret 2006). The continual management of conflict in organisations is stressed by research because there is a clear inverse relationship between unresolved workplace conflict and EE (CIPD 2012).

Despite the significance of the findings as presented in the afore-mentioned study, hardly any additional research on the connection between EE and conflict could be uncovered. Instead, it appears that OCBs partially hope to make conflict seem unrelated to the day-to-day realities of organisational life (Currie *et al.*, 2017; Purcell 2014). The EE research that is now available primarily focuses on the factors that precede or mediate EE (see for instance Albrecht 2012; Breevaart, Bakker, Hetland, Demerouti, Olsen and Espevik 2014; Dromey, 2014; Jenkins and Delbridge 2013; Macleod and Clarke 2009; Schaufeli and Bakker 2004a; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli 2007). Even after conducting a thorough literature search, very little material could be found regarding how EE may mediate conflict or conflict management in organisations, highlighting a significant gap in the existing conflict research.

For instance, research suggests that stress related to external organisational conflict may prevent employees from being engaged at their place of employment (Karam 2011); however, the study did not examine instances of internal organisational conflict. Another study looked at how job engagement, a mediator of task and relationship conflict, affects performance (Jungst and Blumberg, 2016). Jungst and Blumberg (2016) confirm that there has been minimal study on the effects of conflict

on psychological outcomes, such as job engagement, and they make no reference of any studies that have looked at employee or job engagement as a potential mediator of conflict. The results of other studies that looked at the connections between task and relationship conflict and job (but not employee) engagement and knowledge sharing indicated that task conflict has a positive indirect impact on work engagement while relationship conflict has a negative indirect link (Chen, Zhang and Vogel 2011). Additionally, it was discovered that work engagement modulates the link between negative extra-role behaviours (i.e., counterproductive work behaviours) and job demands (i.e., interpersonal work conflict) (Sulea, Virga, Maricutoiu, Schaufeli, Zaborila Dumitru and Sava 2012). Additionally, there is a dearth of study on the pressures associated with conflict and how these affect employee behaviour (Avgar 2017; Karam 2011).

In a similar spirit, it is noted that questions of power and control are not considered in the engagement literature, nor are the intricacies of external and internal organisational environments (Jenkins and Delbridge 2013). Therefore, this study will make a substantial contribution to our understanding of how EE may act as a mediator for conflict management (conflict kinds and interpersonal conflict handling approaches) in organisations.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a comprehensive review and discussion of theoretical propositions and empirical research findings related to EE and workplace conflict. It critically scrutinises a variety of articles and literature related to the study. It also presented various research models on EE and WC presented by other researchers. The study seeks to explore EE amongst workers in HEIs and its implications for workplace conflict. In the next chapter the research design and methodology of the study will be presented.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Lencioni (2015: 23) states that employee engagement is a top talent issue facing many organizations today. Marciano (2010: 119-120) explains that employee engagement has demonstrated benefits for organizations such as increased employee attraction, higher retention, greater productivity, and improved customer service. Comparably, employee engagement in the Higher Education (hereinafter referred to as HE) sector has benefits such as increased faculty retention and enhanced student attainment (Grant and Notter, 2019: 19). However, according to Eisenhauser (2018:4), many HE institutions are not fully focused on investing in employee engagement. The opinion of Eisenhauser (2018: 4) is shared by Smith, Coffey, Compton, Elkins and Gilles (2018: 23), as well as Kenon and Palshole (2019: 3).

HE institutions face unique challenges with regard to sourcing, retaining and engaging employees (Lencioni, 2015: 11). Grant and Notter (2019: 23) explain that nearly half of all HE institutions fail to track employee engagement, and less than 30 percent measure the cost of turnover, which highlights the need for academic institutions to re-assess priorities and implement change. Hauden and Berens (2018: 11) add that one of the first steps in overcoming these challenges is evaluating employee engagement and sentiment to establish a baseline, then setting achievable goals for improvement. Several authors warn that employee engagement cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach (Carbonara, 2012: 18; Morgan and Goldsmith, 2017: 52; Kaye and Giulioni, 2019: 32). Byrne (2014: 91) states that it is important to really listen to employees and source feedback and suggestions from them to build an effective engagement strategy that will benefit employees and students alike. Johnson (2018: 12) and Mone and London (2018:3) agree with the opinion of Byrne

(2014: 91) and warn that a lack of employee engagement often results in workplace conflict, either explicit or latent.

The previous chapter's literature analysis offered a thorough overview of empirical studies on employee engagement and conflict. The theoretical framework that guided the research was also discussed. According to Timans, Wouters and Heilbron (2019: 194), research is the systematic and deliberate process of finding solutions to issues. This chapter discusses the research design and methodology, as well as the procedures for administering the data collection instrument and the methods for collecting and analysing the data. It also contains information about the participants, such as the study's eligibility requirements, who the participants were, and how they were sampled. The chapter also explains why ethical considerations were necessary and how they were handled in this study.

3.2 KEY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives for the study are:

- To explore employee engagement strategies and interventions that are used at DUT;
- To determine the antecedents of employee engagement at DUT;
- To investigate whether employee engagement influences the management of workplace conflict at DUT;

3.3 PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Due to the vast target group, the research design used for this study was quantitative in nature. The goal of a research design, according to Ragab and Arisha (2018: 3), is to plan and structure a specific research endeavour in such a way that the validity of the research findings is maximized. According to Pandey and Pandey (2021: 18), a research design is a strategic framework for action that connects research questions to research execution or implementation. The overall approach for

integrating the many aspects of a study in a coherent and logical manner, ensuring that the research challenge is adequately addressed, is known as a research design (Kazdin 2021: 7). As a result, the type of design utilized is determined by the study problem (Babbie 2020: 88). Geoffrey (2019: 77) expands on the research design description of Pandey and Pandey (2021: 19), declaring that the research design is essentially a blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data since it specifies how the research is going to be executed in such a manner that it answers the research questions. The research design constitutes everything that the researcher employs and does in order to implement the research proposal, achieve the objectives of the research and answer the research questions (Geoffrey 2019: 77).

The goal of a research design, according to Geoffrey (2019: 78), is to create a framework for action that allows the researcher to make clear and acceptable conclusions or inferences from their findings. According to Babbie (2020: 89), the research design ensures that the study achieves a specific response by providing answers to research questions that can resist criticism and ensure that the design influences the validity and correctness of the research findings. This includes a description of the sample selection, data collection and analysis procedures. The research design is defined in this study as a thorough plan, the visualisation of data to be collected, and how challenges linked to the use of those data are to be addressed.

3.3.1 Types of research design

A research design, according to Pandey and Pandey (2021: 20), is a master plan that specifies the methods and procedures for gathering and analysing the required data. The various types of research design are briefly discussed to contextualize the research paradigm used in this study.

3.3.1.1 Quantitative research versus qualitative research

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is based on research paradigms that are different (Bloomfield and Fisher, 2019: 28). Qualitative research focuses on the researcher's ability to obtain information through structured data collection (e.g. observations or interviews), whereas quantitative research focuses on the researcher's ability to gain information through instruments (e.g. questionnaires) (Silverman, 2020: 7). Qualitative research, according to Creswell and Poth (2016: 115), does not rely on the use of numbers or measures and focuses on phenomena that cannot be fully explained by statistics. Qualitative research, according to Bloomfield and Fisher (2019: 30), has a phenomenological approach and is relatively adaptable because data and conditions vary.

Quantitative research, on the other hand, is based on the use of numbers and measures, and has an organized data gathering method (Bloomfield and Fisher, 2019: 31). Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018: 209) state that quantitative research aims to establish causal links. In the quantitative paradigm, the researcher needs a detailed plan for completing the study and is more involved in the data collection process (Rutberg and Bouikidis 2018: 211). The quantitative technique also enables the results of the analysed surveys to be confidently generalised to a larger target population (Rutberg and Bouikidis 2018: 212). Due to the scope of the study, it was decided to take a quantitative explanatory approach so that the vast amounts of data collected could be simply categorised, analysed and reported. According to Ghanad (2023) quantitative research is suitable when a relationship between variables is measured. This study uses a quantitative technique to measure specific variables, test hypotheses, and establish relationships in a systematic and replicable manner. This is consistent with the research objectives and enables the use of statistical tools to get accurate and generalisable results (Rutberg and Bouikidis 2018). Therefore, the quantitative approach was used in the study to statistically test whether EE influences the management of workplace conflict at the DUT.

3.3.1.2 Experimental research versus non-experimental research

There are three major categories of research designs, according to Dannels (2018: 402), namely experimental research, non-experimental research, and qualitative research designs. According to Sileyew (2019: 11), amongst the three study designs listed, quantitative research is suitable for both experimental and non-experimental research. Bloomfield and Fisher (2019: 32) state that an intervention is a prevalent factor in experimental research, and the researcher has no control over the variables. According to Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018: 212), there is no intentional intervention in non-experimental research, and the researcher has no control over the independent variables. Surveys are frequently used in non-experimental research to test scenarios in real social structures (Rahi 2017: 5). A non-experimental research design was chosen for this study to examine the effect of EE on managing workplace conflict at the DUT. Such an approach is justified because the research aims to explore naturally occurring relationships rather than the manipulation of variables. Ethical and practical considerations also make experimental manipulation unfeasible in the workplace context. Additionally, the non-experimental design allows for the collection of data in a real-world setting, thereby enhancing the relevance and applicability of the findings. This methodology is consistent with prior research in organizational behavior, which frequently relies on non-experimental, survey-based methods to investigate similar topics (Reio, 2016; Kumar, 2018; Williams, Vogt and Wiggins, 2022).

3.3.1.3 Exploratory research, descriptive research and explanatory research

According to Rahi (2017: 6), social science research can be classified into three types of study, namely exploratory research, descriptive research and explanatory research. Exploratory research is the first step in defining and clarifying the nature of a problem that has yet to be defined in a specific situation (Swedberg, 2020: 17). Exploratory research, according to Casula, Rangarajan and Shields (2021: 1703), is

employed when problems are in the initial stages and can address a wide range of research concerns. Exploratory research, according to Swedberg (2020: 23), is frequently used to create formal hypotheses and set the framework for future study. Rather than offering quantification, explanatory research, according to Casula, Rangarajan and Shields (2021: 1710), provides a better grasp of a topic or situation. Hunter, McCallum and Howes (2019: 5) postulate that descriptive research is used to characterize people and settings. Data from descriptive research might be qualitative or quantitative, according to Pandey and Pandey (2021: 90). Quantitative data displays, on the other hand, are usually restricted to frequency distributions and summary statistics (Hunter, McCallum and Howes, 2019: 5). The basic goal of explanatory research, according to Cantwell (2020: 155), is to explain why events occur and to anticipate future occurrences. Explanatory research is described by Bloomfield and Fisher (2019: 31) as trying to understand the nature of the link between independent and dependent variables. Therefore, the explanatory research process was used to determine the influence of EE on managing workplace conflict at the DUT in this study. For the empirical research, a quantitative approach was used.

3.4 PRIMARY DATA

Primary data is gathered through a direct observation of the phenomenon under inquiry, or is collected first-hand, according to Kumar (2018: 49). Primary data is frequently found after the researcher has gained some insight into the problem by reading secondary data or analysing previously collected data, according to Bloomfield and Fisher (2019: 33). Primary data is acquired for a specific goal, according to Rahi (2019: 8), and the researcher is in control of the process. However, Bloomfield and Fisher (2019: 34) mention that primary data is costly to collect and takes a long time to process. Interviews, personal or telephone contacts, and self-administered surveys are various methods for gathering primary data (Kumar 2018: 51). As a data-gathering tool, a closed-ended structured quantitative questionnaire (Annexure B) was used. The use of such a data gathering instrument is efficient for

data analysis and was considered ideal for the study as it involved a large number of respondents, aimed to gather numerical data and provide statistical insights and allowed for the identification of trends and patterns efficiently. Closed-ended questions also limit the responses to specific choices which ensures that respondents choose from the available options, thereby avoiding ambiguous and open-ended responses.

3.5 SECONDARY DATA

Secondary data, according to Halcomb and Hickman (2015: 7), is information gathered by people or organizations other than the researcher. In addition, Doyle, Brady and Byrne (2016: 626) state that the importance of secondary data is that it allows the researcher to use and analyse existing data. According to Bloomfield and Fisher (2019: 36), while secondary data saves time and money, it requires the researcher to be very selective when using it. This study's secondary data was sourced from a thorough review of journal articles, related textbooks, the internet, media pieces, government documents, periodicals, and relevant dissertations and theses.

3.6 TARGET POPULATION

The real specification of a sample, according to Maxwell (2016: 13), must begin with the selection of a population to be surveyed. The target population is described by Kumar (2018: 52) as the group of persons who are the subject of the survey and from whom conclusions are drawn. Alternatively, a population might be described as finite or infinite (Maxwell, 2016: 15). In a finite population, the number of individuals or items is restricted or fixed, whereas in an infinite population, the number of individuals or objects is unlimited or non-fixed (Rahi 2017: 10). According to McKim (2017: 203), the researcher must anticipate decisions likely to arise during the sample selection process, and respondents must have the necessary knowledge and features or characteristics.

A population is described by Doyle, Brady and Byrne (2016: 628) as a homogeneous mass of individual units. Kumar (2018: 56) mentions that while the population is divided into multiple strata, the units within each stratum should be as homogeneous as feasible. Due to time and financial constraints, Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017: 108) conclude that it is often not practical to investigate the entire population.

All academic and administrative/support staff members of the DUT in KwaZulu-Natal were thus included in the study's target population. The target population's source list came from an internal staff directory obtained from the DUT's Human Resource Department. This source list was divided into two separate lists, namely Staff List A (Academic staff) and Staff List B (Administrative/Support services staff). These were further organised alphabetically according to DUT employees' surnames.

Prior to the researcher's pre-testing and pilot study, the target population consisted of 1920 employees. The first group, academic staff (Group A/staff list A), had 792 academic staff members, whereas the second group, administrative/support Services staff (Group B/staff List B), had 1128 administrative employees. The measurement instrument was submitted for pre-testing to 14 DUT employees who were randomly selected to scrutinise the questionnaire. Furthermore, a pilot study was conducted with 30 randomly selected DUT employees to determine the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument. Employees who participated in the pre-testing and the pilot study were excluded from the total target population for the study to avoid duplication. After the staff who participated in the pre-testing and pilot study were removed, the academic staff (Group A / staff list A) was reduced to 770 academic employees and the administrative/support services staff (Group B / Staff List B) to 1106 administrative employees. Therefore, the study's target population was equal to N=1876. Table 3.1 below provides a brief overview of the discussion above.

Table 3.1: Identification of the target population for the current study

	ACADEMIC STAFF (STAFF LIST A)	ADMINISTRATIVE/SUP PORT SERVICES STAFF (STAFF LIST B)	TOTAL
INITIAL TARGET POPULATION	792	1128	1920
(LESS) PRE-TEST SAMPLE	7	7	14
(LESS) PILOT STUDY SAMPLE	15	15	30
(EQUALS) TARGET POPULATION FOR THE STUDY	770	1106	1876

3.7 THE SAMPLING PROCEDURE

A sample, according to Cantwell (2020: 154), is a segment of the population that reflects the characteristics of the entire population. A population or universe, according to Bell (2022: 187), is the sum of all elements, whereas the survey population is the sum of elements from which the sample is drawn. The sampling unit is the entity that the survey is focused on (Cantwell 2020: 156). The sampling technique, according to Hunter, McCallum and Howes (2019: 8), requires drawing a representative sample that contains all of the universe's constituents, which can be limited or infinite. The most significant aspect of a sample, according to Bloomfield and Fisher (2019: 38), is its representativeness. The goal is to choose a representative sample from which the researcher will offer conclusions and suggestions (Bell, 2022: 189). The ideal sample size for a target population of N=1876 items, according to Sekaran's (1992: 253) computed table (Annexure D), is

n=320. The process for choosing the sample is described here because it is important to the methodological procedure used.

3.7.1 Probability versus non-probability sampling

There are two types of sampling procedures, according to Pandey and Pandey (2021: 46), namely probability and non-probability sampling approaches. Probability sampling is a technique for picking representative samples from large, well-studied populations (Rahi 2017: 11). The amount of sampling error that can be predicted in any given sample can be estimated using probability sampling methods (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine and Walker, 2018: 11) Non-probability sampling, on the other hand, is random and subjective and therefore runs the danger of adding bias into the sample because all elements in the population do not have an equal opportunity of being selected (Geoffrey 2019: 81).

Probability sampling was chosen for this study for the following reasons: To begin, the researcher recognized the necessity of drawing statistical conclusions from the sample and worked to reduce selection bias (Schoonenboom and Johnson 2017: 110). Secondly, the population was heterogeneous (i.e., both academic and administrative workers were included in the N=1830 target population). The population elements, on the other hand, were easy to access or locate, and the populace was not widely dispersed (Ary, Jacobs, Irvine and Walker 2018: 13). Thirdly, a quantitative approach was employed with a large sample size in mind (Silverman 2020: 8). Finally, the sampling frame was accessible, but due to the study's research aims, there was no need to target specific sections of the population (Bell, 2022: 190). Simple random sampling, stratified sampling, systematic sampling and cluster sampling are the four major types of probability sample designs (Berndt 2020: 224). The researcher utilized a simple random sampling strategy for their study. This method was used to pick a large sample size to balance the proportionate representivity of academic and administrative staff in the 320-element sample.

3.7.2 Simple random sampling

Simple random sampling, according to Pandey and Pandey (2021: 47), is a probability sampling process that offers every element in the target population an equal chance of being selected. For the quantitative research design, the simple random sampling methodology was employed as a probability sampling method. Simple random sampling is described by Kumar (2018: 60) as providing the researcher with a sample that is highly representative of the community under study. Furthermore, Sileyew (2019: 18) states that simple random sampling is useful, if a complete list of the population is available and the sample frame is sorted.

According to Snyder (2019: 333), basic random sampling can be divided into two types, namely sampling with replacement and sampling without replacement. After an element has been selected from the sample frame, it is returned to the frame and is eligible to be selected again in sampling with replacement (Berndt, 2020: 229). After an element is selected from the sample frame, it is removed from the population and not returned to the sampling frame in sampling without replacement (Booth, Colomb and Williams 2018: 15). According to Geoffrey (2019: 87), random sampling without replacement is more efficient in obtaining representative samples than sampling with replacement because it prevents the same population element from entering the sample more than once. The probability sampling technique employed in this study was simple random sampling without replacement. Furthermore, according to Berndt (2020: 235), when utilizing basic random sampling, either a manual approach or a calculated program can be used. To eliminate human bias in this study, the researcher utilized the data analysis option in MS Excel to create 320 random numbers ranging from 1 to 1876. The sample size ($n=320$) was calculated using Sekaran's (1992: 253) computed table (Annexure D).

3.8 SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE

Berndt (2020: 237) postulates that the procedure used to choose a sample from the population is referred to as sample selection. According to Bell (2022: 195), sample size refers to the number of participants in a study. McKim (2017: 213) avers that the larger the sample, the better the chances of getting relevant statistical data. According to Quinlan, Babbitt, Carr and Griffin (2019: 158), selecting a larger sample yields substantial statistical results for generalizations while also removing sampling flaws. The sample for the quantitative research design was chosen using Sekaran's (1992: 253) table (Annexure D) for calculating the best sample size from a given population. Sekaran (1992: 253) recommends a sample size of $n=320$ for this study based on a total target population of $N=1876$.

In order to choose the sample for this study, the researcher followed the steps below:

- The overall target population was determined by obtaining the DUT's Human Resource Department's source list of academic and administrative staff ($N=1876$). The source list was separated into academic and administrative workers, allowing the proportionate sample to be selected from both groups: 770 academic staff (Group A/staff list A) and 1106 administrative staff (Group B /staff list B) were on the source list, which was arranged alphabetically.
- The sample size was calculated proportionately by dividing the total number of academics in the target population, namely 770 academic personnel (Group A / Staff List A), by the overall population size, which equals 41 percent of the total population ($N=1876$). Secondly, the total number of administrative personnel, 1106 (Group B / Staff List B), was divided by the total population size, which equals 59 percent of the total population ($N=1876$).

- To ensure that the number of academics and administrative employees sampled was evenly distributed, these proportionate computations were used to obtain a sample size of $n=320$. As a result, 131 respondents were required for the academic group (Group A/Staff List A) and 189 respondents were required for the administrative group (Group B/Staff List B). Table 3.2 below depicts the distribution of the selected sample at the DUT.

Table 3.2: Breakdown of the composition of the sample size based on academic and admin/support staff

	ACADEMIC SAMPLE (STAFF LIST A)	ADMINISTRATIVE/ SUPPORT SAMPLE (STAFF LIST B)	SUB-TOTAL
SAMPLE SIZE	131 (41%)	189 (59%)	320 (100%)

The questionnaire was developed using the MS Teams form option, since all the participants are employed at the DUT and correspondence was sent to the employees' DUT email addresses. This email consisted of a covering letter (Annexure A), the ethics approval letter from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) (Annexure C) and a link of the MS Teams form, which was sent to the randomly selected sample ($n=320$). This is also outlined in sections 3.10.7 and 3.15 below. One hundred and ninety-eight (198) respondents completed the survey. As a result, the study's response rate was 62 percent.

After describing the study's target population and the methodology used to choose the sample, as well as the sample size, the researcher describes the research instrument that was utilized to collect the data. Since the research approach was quantitative, a closed-ended structured questionnaire was used for this study.

3.9 MEASURING INSTRUMENT

Researchers utilize measurement tools to aid in the examination or evaluation of a wide range of characteristics (Maxwell 2016: 20). A questionnaire, according to Kumar (2018: 65), is a group of questions on a form that respondents fill out in response to a research project in order enable the researcher to implement scientific methods and collect data from the respondents. A closed-ended structured quantitative questionnaire was constructed for this study (Annexure B).

3.9.1 Brief perspectives on the use of questionnaires

Maxwell (2016: 22) states that a questionnaire aids in the collection of data for a study, and the procedure is driven by the study's goal. A questionnaire, according to Timans, Wouters and Heilbron (2019: 195), is a data collecting approach that is the most widely utilized instrument of all. Doyle, Brady and Byrne (2016: 630), for example, agree that a questionnaire is one of the most used instruments for acquiring data. A questionnaire, according to Geoffrey (2019: 90), is a formalized series of questions for gathering information from respondents and is considered the major method of collecting quantitative primary data. Pandey and Pandey (2021: 58) emphasize that the questionnaire must also meet the assumptions that are used to construct surveys, namely:

- that the respondents can read and understand the questions;
- that the respondents are in a position to provide the information needed to answer the questions;
- that the respondents are willing to answer the questions;
- that the respondents are in a position to provide the information needed to answer the questions; and
- that the results of the study and their implications for improving people's lives would pique the respondents' attention.

3.9.2 Guidelines followed in developing the measuring instrument

A questionnaire must be well-designed because it is extremely rare for the researcher to be able to repeat the survey if the researcher discovers afterwards that the questionnaire was incomplete or that an important topic was left out (Creswell and Poth 2016: 116). Good questionnaires, according to Kumar (2018: 189), accomplish research objectives, gather valid and reliable data from respondents, enable data processing, and attain and retain respondent involvement. The response to a questionnaire is voluntary, according to Timans, Wouters and Heilbron (2019: 197). Sileyew (2019: 21) states that a good questionnaire should be designed to keep respondents' attention. As a result, the questionnaire should appear professional and include precise and clear instructions on how to answer the questions. To make a questionnaire easier to read, Snyder (2019: 338) recommends that it be separated into logical sections. When creating a questionnaire, double-barrelled, sensitive, leading and negative questions should be avoided, according to Mishra and Alok (2017: 60).

3.9.3 Advantages of a structured questionnaire

A structured questionnaire, according to Timans, Wouters and Heilbron (2019: 199), allows the researcher to quickly contact a large number of respondents. Doyle, Brady and Byrne (2016: 632) state that structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions are reasonably simple to construct, code and interpret. The structured questionnaire, according to Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017: 115), is simple to standardize because each responder is asked the same question in the same way. As a result, the researcher can be confident that all respondents in the sample will answer the identical questions, making this a dependable research method (Pandey and Pandey 2021: 59). According to Dannels (2018: 410), a structured questionnaire places a lower cognitive load on the respondent and minimizes the amount of thinking required, resulting in higher replies and more accurate data. A

closed-ended structured questionnaire (Annexure B) was constructed for this study, taking into account the vast target population and the sample size chosen.

3.9.4 Design of the questionnaire

The questionnaire's architecture and design went through multiple revisions in this study, requiring a significant amount of time for modification before the final research instrument was produced. This study's questionnaire consisted of only structured closed-ended questions. The questions were written to focus on a certain topic in order to get precise data that could be analysed statistically. Single-response statements with nominal and ordinal categories, as well as scaled questions, were employed in the questionnaire. Respondents were given a variety of options to choose from when answering single-response questions. The five-point Likert scale was used to elicit agreement or disagreement for the scaled questions, with a neutral column for each of a sequence of statements relating to the main theme. According to Maxwell (2016: 23), the Likert scale is widely used because of its capacity to assess attitudes, beliefs and opinions. The study objectives and the exploratory model were both linked with the Likert scale.

3.9.5 Coding the questionnaire

The questionnaire's design had the advantage of including pre-coded questions in the sequence of options provided. Coding is the process of assigning numerical codes to each response that belongs to a specific portion of the questionnaire (Sileyew 2019: 22). According to Kumar (2018: 190), including pre-coded questions makes data collection easier because the respondent only needs to circle the numeric code on each Likert scale statement.

3.9.6 An overview of the final questionnaire

The instrument used in this study was a pre-coded structured questionnaire that was carefully designed to encourage maximum response while also obtaining more thorough data. EE questions were adapted from the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) q12 survey, while the conflict questions were adapted from Jehn's Intragroup Conflict Scale, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Questionnaire and Rahim's Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II). The questionnaire (Annexure B) is divided into the following two sections and contains 71 statements in total:

- Section A: Biographical information (6 statements relating to age, gender, length of service, education and category of employment)
- Section B: Employee Engagement and Workplace Conflict (65 statements covering the constructs of employee engagement and workplace conflict)

Furthermore, a brief definition from an author was highlighted at the top of Section B to create awareness of the concepts.

3.9.7 The covering letter

The importance of the study, the purpose of the questionnaire, and the value of participation are all outlined in a covering letter (Annexure A) addressed to the participants in the email correspondence from the researcher (Refer to section 3.9 above). To entice the respondent's co-operation and support, an incentive in the form of mailing the questionnaire's summary findings was incorporated. The return rate was further boosted by reassuring respondents of their confidentiality and anonymity, as well as emphasizing the relevance of EE and WC in the HE sector, with a focus on the DUT. The researcher wrote the covering letter (Annexure A), which was formalized on a DUT letterhead with the researcher's identification. It was also counter-signed by the study's supervisor to ensure its authenticity and to elicit co-operation from the participants.

3.10 PRE-TESTING

Pre-testing is the common process of putting a questionnaire through its paces with a small group of people to ensure that it is well-understood and operates as expected (Geoffrey 2019: 91). It allows the researcher to amend any errors before distributing the final questionnaire to the sample respondents (Pandey and Pandey 2021: 58). The importance of pre-testing comes from ensuring that the respondent understands every question or statement, that the language and terminology is clear and easy to grasp, and that the instructions to the respondents are understandable (Willis 2016: 359). Pre-testing is necessary for the researcher to be satisfied with the questionnaire's design; to make the questionnaire easier to administer; and to encourage positive respondent engagement (Geoffrey 2019: 94). To speed up the data collection process, the responses should be clear and correct (Willis 2016: 360).

A pre-test was conducted to ensure that the measurement instrument was understood and performed as required (Mishra and Alok 2022) and to determine its validity and reliability. The questionnaire was distributed to seven (7) academic staff and seven (7) administrative/support services staff. The 14 employees chosen for pre-testing were not included in the target population (N=1876). The opinions from the 14 co-workers were compiled for constructive improvement to fine-tune the questionnaire even more. These suggestions were crucial in the questionnaire's future editing, phrasing and language. Fluidity, consistency and standardization were included in the questionnaire.

3.11 THE PILOT STUDY

According to Dannels (2018: 411), a pilot study is a trial run that can be linked to a small-scale survey. It aids in the determination of demographic characteristics as well as the sample's feasibility. The goal of the pilot study was to verify the questionnaires' validity and reliability in order to make any required improvements to the method before beginning the actual fieldwork (Geoffrey 2019: 95). As a

precaution, Kumar (2018: 191) suggests that the trial subjects be representative and homogeneous of the target population in terms of intellectual aptitude, understanding of the subject matter, and attitude toward it. According to Pandey and Pandey (2021: 21), the pilot research that includes the trial run evaluates the study's advanced feasibility and guarantees that the responses chosen as viable answers cover a wide range of possibilities. The researcher should be satisfied with the questionnaire's acceptance after the pilot study, thus the pilot test should be administered in the same way as the final study (Dannels 2018: 412).

The pilot test was given to a group of 30 people who were not part of the target population (N=1876). The 30 people who participated in the pilot project were 15 academics and 15 administrative workers, who were chosen from staff list A and staff list B respectively.

3.12 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT

Timans, Wouters and Heilbron (2019: 200) state that a research study's findings must be credible and valid for it to be accurate. According to Kumar (2018: 192), dependability means that the results would be consistent if the study were repeated. Validity is defined by Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn and Dos Santos (2021) as the honesty of the research findings. According to Swedberg (2020:34), a study can be trustworthy but not valid, and it cannot be valid without being reliable first. Mohajan (2017: 59) emphasizes that no matter how dependable the measures are, a researcher should never assume validity.

3.12.1 Validity of the questionnaire

Boparai, Singh and Kathuria (2018: 210) advise that a questionnaire must be able to reliably measure what it is designed to measure to be valid. According to McKim (2017: 214), an instrument should be used for the specific reasons for which it was intended, and the concept of validity indicates the soundness of research outcomes.

Validity is defined by Bell (2022: 196) as a measuring instrument accurately measuring what it is designed to measure and enables the right interpretation of data and the drawing of acceptable population conclusions. Quinlan, Babin, Carr and Griffin (2019: 160) posit that validity can take several different Forms, namely:

- *Face validity* refers to how well a test is perceived to cover the idea it is supposed to measure.
- The accuracy with which a measurement instrument taps into the many components of the specific construct in question is referred to as *content validity*.
- *Criterion validity* is determined by comparing scores on an instrument to an external criterion that is known or thought to assess the concept, trait or behaviour under investigation; and
- *Construct validity* is concerned with the measurement instrument's validation in terms of what it is measuring, how and why it operates the way it does, and the theory behind it.

The researcher's primary focus in the current study was on face, content and construct validity according to Brannigan and Watson (2009: 3240), content validity is the precision with which a research tool evaluates the factors under investigation by including all the relevant and excluding all the irrelevant issues related to the content. The literature review identified and discussed the key elements of the constructs in the study, and each item was developed from the appropriate measurement scales pertaining to the constructs of EE and workplace conflict. As a result, content validity assessed the degree to which the questions elicited the desired information. Face validity was ensured by allowing the research supervisor to review the questionnaire and confirm whether the items measured what they were supposed to measure. This ensured that the questions asked were aligned with the study's aims and research questions. Construct validity was achieved by performing a factor analysis to confirm that items load onto the expected factors and those that did not load strongly enough onto any factor were dropped.

3.12.2 Reliability of the questionnaire

According to Singh (2017: 790), reliability is concerned with accuracy and can be defined as the degree of consistency of the measurement equipment. Yaddanapudi and Yaddanapudi (2019: 335) state that dependability refers to the fact that when a question is asked in comparable conditions, it elicits the same set of responses each time. There are four categories of dependability, according to Willis (2016: 360), including *inter-rater or observer reliability*, which relates to the degree to which different respondents offer consistent answers in a measurement instrument. The second sort of dependability is *test-retest reliability*, which refers to a measurement instrument's consistency throughout time. Finally, according to Willis (2016: 361), *parallel-forms of reliability* refer to the consistency of results across items often measured with the Cronbach Co-efficient Alpha statistical tool, and *internal consistency reliability* refers to the consistency of results across items constructed in the same way, from the same content.

Internal consistency reliability was employed to determine the reliability construct in this study. Internal consistency reliability, according to Wright, O'Brien, Nimmon, Law and Mylopoulos (2016: 97), happens when two or more measurements of the same idea are taken at the same time and then compared to ascertain if they agree. Furthermore, according to McNeish (2018: 412), the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha approach should be employed to assess a measurement instrument's dependability. The Co-efficient Alpha is a method of evaluating a measuring instrument's internal consistency by averaging all potential test item splits and determining the degree of correlation (Bujang, Omar and Baharum, 2018: 85). The higher the internal consistency, the closer the correlation is to a score of one (Quinlan, Babin, Carr and Griffin, 2019: 161). Cronbach's Alpha for the Pilot Test is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Cronbach alpha for the pilot test

Aspect	Overall Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardised items	Cronbach's Alpha split-half (Equal)	Cronbach's Alpha split-half (Unequal)	Gutman
Alpha	0.796	0.837	0.787	0.799	0.816

Cronbach's Alpha for Section B of the questionnaire (Annexure B) used in the pilot study was above the norm of 0.6, as shown in Table 3.2. (Quinlan, Babin, Carr and Griffin 2019: 162). The pilot study questionnaire's overall Cronbach's Alpha was 0.796, which shows a high level of reliability as a measurement instrument.

3.13 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collecting strategies, according to Kumar (2018: 193), allow researchers to collect data in a systematic way in order to provide conclusive answers to problems. As stated in Table 3.4, Geoffrey (2019:9 6) considers the criteria as well as the various methods/procedures for data collecting.

Table 3.4: Criteria and data collection techniques

No	Criteria	Personal method	Telephone interview	Online survey
1	Cost	Most expensive	Intermediate	Least expensive
2	Speed	Slowest	Fastest	Intermediate
3	Accuracy	Most accurate	Least	Intermediate
4	Amount of Data	Most	Least	Intermediate
5	Response Rate	Highest	Intermediate	Lowest
6	Flexibility	Most flexible	Intermediate	Least flexible
7	Control • Sample • Interview • Administration	Intermediate Best Worst	Worst Intermediate Intermediate	Best Worst Best

Source: Geoffrey (2019: 98). Adapted

Table 3.4 shows that collecting data on one's own has numerous advantages. From the table above, the most accurate way of data gathering appears to be the personal method, which yields the highest response rate. The personal way of administration, according to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005: 257), ensures a high response rate when compared to other approaches. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, government restrictions on face-to-face interactions and DUT employees working remotely, the use of the personal method was restricted for this specific study. The researcher instead sent out the questionnaire electronically via email, with a link to an MS Teams form with a covering letter (Annexure A) and ethics approval letter (Annexure C) to all participants. Access to participants' emails was obtained from the Human Resource Department at the DUT. A gate-keepers letter was also issued to the researcher granting permission to conduct the study (Annexure F) All participants completed the questionnaire anonymously thereby ensuring confidentiality of the data collection process and subsequent compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act of 2013 (POPIA). A closed-ended structured

quantitative questionnaire was constructed for this study (Annexure B). Although in Table 3.4 it is stated that the online survey method has the lowest response rate, this pre-empted restriction did not have a negative impact on the study since participants were working remotely and online during Covid-19.

3.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Halcomb and Hickman (2015: 8), there are various reasons that it is critical to follow ethical guidelines in research. Firstly, norms foster research goals such as knowledge, truth and error avoidance. Secondly, because research frequently entails a considerable degree of collaboration and co-ordination amongst many different persons from various fields, ethical norms encourage values such as trust, accountability, mutual respect and fairness, which are critical to collaborative work. Finally, numerous ethical protocols aid in the researcher's ability to be held accountable to the public.

Bell (2022: 197) states that respondents may have a variety of queries about the research that they have been requested to participate in. For this reason, a covering letter (Annexure A) was attached to each email sent out to introduce and orientate the participant to the research. According to Artal and Rubinfeld (2017: 107), all ethical concerns relating to the study were duly communicated to the participants in the email correspondence (see Section 3.9 above). Furthermore, respondents' rights to self-determination and full transparency, according to Recker (2021: 197), was emphasized by the researcher in the cover letter.

The research study sought approval from the institution (DUT) to conduct research. After receiving the gate-keeper's letter (Annexure F), the researcher interrogated the potential ethical issues that may have arisen during and after the study. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the questionnaire contained an informed consent letter (Annexures A and E) in line with the guidelines of POPIA (2013) that encompassed the purpose of the study, the expected duration of the field work, the right of the

respondent to refuse to participate in the study or alternatively, to withdraw at any time without aversion on the part of the researcher and that confidentiality of all respondents would be maintained throughout the study through the anonymous completion of the questionnaire. The researcher also abstained from invading the respondents' privacy. In addition, no monetary compensation or coercion was offered or applied during the administration of the questionnaire. Moreover, data collected was securely kept, thus maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents. It must also be noted that an ethical clearance letter (Annexure C) was issued by the DUT's Institutional Research Committee (IREC) after the proposal and the questionnaire (Annexure B) were thoroughly assessed by experienced reviewers and approved by the Management Sciences Faculty Research Committee Panel. The ethical clearance number is: IREC 269/21.

3.15 CODING AND EDITING

Editing, according to Bujang, Omar and Baharum (2018: 87), comprises a comprehensive and critical assessment of the completed surveys. As a result, it is critical that the data be double-checked for completeness and quality before being accepted for capture. Data was tidied up after the closed-ended structured quantitative questionnaire responses were obtained. Each completed return was examined to confirm that the completeness criteria were met. The researcher then used the surveys to create a dataset on the computer for statistical analysis.

3.16 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 for Windows was used to analyse the responses. The statistical analysis was divided into two phases: the first phase included descriptive statistical analysis, and the second phase included hypothesis testing using inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, according to George and Mallery (2018: 126), entails organizing and summarizing data using tables, graphs and computing descriptive measures. Inferential statistics,

according to George and Mallery (2018: 127), use robust statistical tests to create meaningful values about the hypothesis investigated. The sort of parametric tests used was determined by the nature of the data collected, which included ordinal, nominal, ratio and interval scales. In order to explore the structure of the data when a construct is measured using several items and reduce them to a small number of latent variables, factor analysis with promax rotation is applied to the set of items in the construct. During the process, some items may be dropped either because they do not load strongly enough onto any factor or because they cross-load onto multiple factors. The reliability of combining the items into a single latent variable is tested using Cronbach's alpha. An alpha value of at least 0.7 is considered adequate. If items do not correlate strongly enough with the other items in the construct and negatively affect the reliability, they may be dropped. The factor extraction is deemed to be successful if the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) exceeds 0.6 and Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant.

3.17 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the research design, the target population, and the sample selection process. It also highlighted the data collection procedure, as well as the sample approach used. The analysis of the results and discussion of the findings are presented in the next chapter. In Chapter 4, a detailed discussion follows relating to the use of descriptive and inferential statistics in this study.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter introduced the research methodology that guided the data collection and research. With the guidance of the research questions and methods used in the study, the main aim of the study was to determine the influence of Employee Engagement (EE) on managing Workplace Conflict (WC) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). In this chapter, the data analysis and a thorough discussion of the findings drawn from the empirical study of the responses gleaned from the collected data are presented. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 for Windows was used to examine the data gathered from the sample respondents.

The study employed a quantitative research design using a pre-coded structured closed-ended questionnaire (Annexure B) that included a 5-point Likert scale. The measuring instrument, a questionnaire (Annexure B), was given to the chosen sample of participants. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, namely Section A and B. In Section A, the researcher sought to collect the biographical information of the respondents, such as age, gender, employment categories, etcetera, while Section B attempted to solicit responses under the two themes or constructs related to the topic (employee engagement and workplace conflict). In line with the statistical tests that were employed, the analysis and discussion of the results are also highlighted in this chapter. After the initial research proposal was reviewed by the Ethics Panel and the questionnaire was evaluated, the DUT Institutional Research Ethics Committee granted approval for an ethical clearance letter (Annexure C) to carry out an internal investigation within the university. The DUT's 1876 employees made up the target population. A random sample selection method without replacement was utilised to select the sample of respondents. Consequently, the DUT's academic and administrative staff members were included in the sample of

320 employees. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and government restrictions on face-to-face interactions at the time, the researcher sent out questionnaires electronically via Microsoft Teams. From the 320 questionnaires that were distributed, 198 questionnaires were returned. The subsequent response rate was 62% of the sample size (N=320). This is consistent with the argument presented by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), who stated that any response rate of 50% or more would support the validity of the research findings.

Using Microsoft Excel, the preliminary computation of the results for Section A involved the use of descriptive statistics for the demographic variables and general information. The researcher provided insightful analyses for Section B in the form of frequencies and percentages for the remaining statements in a tabulated summary format, which are published in this chapter. This was justified by the fact that the questionnaire included 5-point Likert scale statements in Section B and that sample respondents provided the responses accordingly. The replies were also analysed, and more crucially, the hypotheses developed for each theme were tested using descriptive and inferential statistics in the major analysis for Section B.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF DATA

Marshall and Jonker (2011:4) state that there are two branches of inferential statistics: non-parametric and parametric statistical tests. The following table (Table 4.1) provides an overview of the descriptive and inferential statistics employed in this empirical study. Section A uses descriptive statistics to examine the sample profile and important demographics as part of the preliminary presentation and analysis of the results. Significant trends that emerged from the many hypotheses examined for both sections were also reported and further validated by other authors, or by means of comparable findings made in other studies by different researchers, in order to improve the quality of the statistical data.

The analyses of the results are presented in sequential order with the two sections of the Questionnaire (Annexure B) as follows:

- Section A: General information
- Section B: Employee Engagement and Workplace Conflict

The relevant statistical tests that were performed using SPSS version 29 for Windows for each portion of the questionnaire are summarised in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Summary of the statistical tests used for the analysis of the data and hypothesis testing

SECTIONS	ANALYSIS OF RESULTS	
	DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS	INFERENTIAL STATISTICS
Section A: General Information	• Graphs • Pie-charts • Tables depicting comparative analysis (cross-tabulations)	
Section B: Employee Engagement and Workplace Conflict	• Frequency distribution tables	• Factor Analysis • Regression Analysis • One sample T-test

The usage of frequency tables showing comparative analyses for the dataset's demographics and descriptive statistics is highlighted in the analysis for Section A of the questionnaire (Annexure B). For the analysis of the data, the researcher used descriptive and suitable non-parametric tests for Section B of the questionnaire. A

brief explanation of the differences between inferential and descriptive statistics using the study's empirical analysis as a guide follows below.

4.2.1 Use of descriptive statistics

In addition to classifying and summarising numerical data, descriptive statistics provide a technique for describing the phenomena of interest in data analysis (Bougie and Sekaran, 2019:260). Descriptive statistics, which included pie charts, bar graphs and tables for comparison analysis, were utilised to illustrate the examined data in Section A of the data analyses of results. Descriptive statistics were employed for Section B of the questionnaire. These were summarised frequency tables that showed the percentage and overall sum of responses for Section B of the questionnaire (Annexure B). Regarding responses for Section B, these comparative studies helped to clarify the frequency response rate of the Administrative Sample Group and the Academic Sample Group at the DUT.

4.2.2 Use of inferential statistics

Generalisations from the sample to the population are done using inferential statistics, according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016:154). This study employed several pertinent non-parametric statistical tests to measure the opinions of the corresponding sample respondents, as well as to assess the estimated links between those factors and those components judged to have a major impact on the study and variables. Given the ordinal structure of the data and the existence of two separate sample groups, non-parametric tests were chosen because the data did not need to have a particular distribution (Pandey and Pandey 2010:123).

4.3 SECTION A: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS PERTAINING TO THE GENERAL INFORMATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

The focus of this section is a preliminary analysis that provides a baseline or descriptive analysis of the sample's overall demographic data. Prior research has demonstrated a noteworthy distinction in the degree of employee engagement amongst various demographic groups, including age, gender, permanent employment, years of service, educational qualifications, and so forth (Sharma and Rajput 2021:26). A total of 198 of the 320 potential respondents in the sample completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 62%. This is in line with Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), who suggested that any response rate above 50% ensures the validity of the findings of the study.

4.3.1 Comparison between Permanent and Contract Staff

Figure 4.1: Analysis of employment status (permanent and contract staff) at the DUT (n = 198)

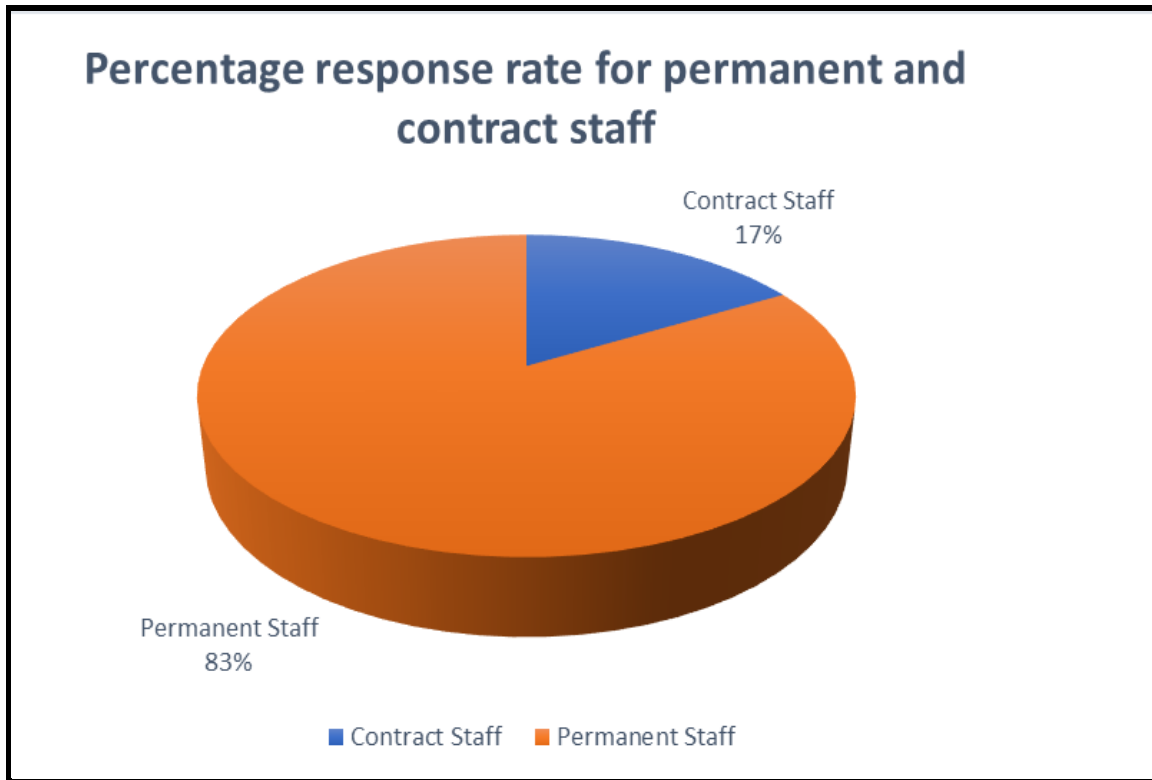


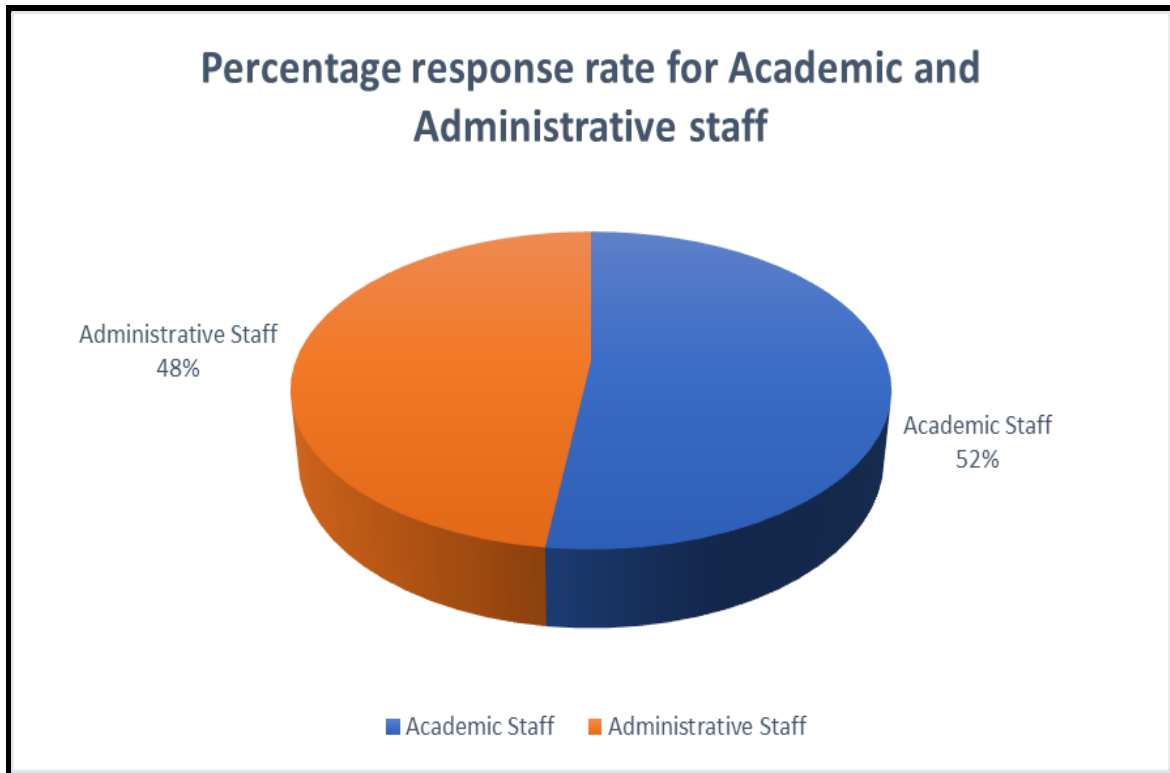
Figure 4.1 above reflects the percentage responses of the sample respondents in relation to permanent and contract staff, as stated by the sample respondents. Respondents were asked whether they worked at the DUT on a permanent or contract basis. According to the reported results in Figure 4.1 above, the majority of respondents (83%) were working at the DUT on a permanent basis, while 17% were employed on a fixed-term contract basis. Valadez and Anthony (2001 cited in Strydom, 2011:62) state that an ongoing trend in universities is the growing reliance of academics/lecturers on fixed-term contracts. This is also confirmed by Coetzee (2014:12) and the Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (2015), who acknowledge that full-time employment is declining, while atypical, non-standard employment is on the increase in South African higher education, coupled with unfavourable working conditions and job insecurity, heavy teaching loads and limited

access to professional growth.

According to research by Mngoma (2014 cited in Lourens 2016), the nature of the job affects both the costs incurred by the organisation due to excessive labour turnover, and the expectations of employees about working conditions. A study by Coetzee and de Villiers (2010) amongst staff employed in financial institutions in South Africa found that permanently employed staff have a higher level of engagement than those employed on temporary contracts. The authors surmised that permanently employed staff have an increased sense of job security, job resources and efficacy in handling challenges presented in the workplace (Coetzee and Villiers, 2010 cited in Sharma and Rajput 2021). However, Sharma and Rajput (2017a), in a study amongst IT employees in India, found no major difference between engagement and being employed permanent. On the other hand, studies by Brim (2002) and Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004) found an inverse relationship between permanent employment (tenure) and employee engagement levels (cited in Sharma and Rajput 2021). Additionally, Holtzhausen (2020) suggests that tenure or permanent employment influences the conflict experienced in organisations.

4.3.2 Comparison between academic and administrative staff at the DUT

Figure 4.2: Analysis of employment category (academic and administrative/support services staff) at the DUT (n = 198)



The percentage responses from the study's administrative and academic sample respondents are shown in the pie chart in Figure 4.2 above. Regarding the total response by the sample respondents derived from the returned questionnaires, respondents were asked to specify whether they were employed at the DUT in an academic or administrative capacity. The results in Figure 4.2 indicate that 52% of respondents were academic staff members and 48% work in administrative positions at DUT. At this point, it is worth noting that in almost all HE institutions, administrative employees always outnumber academic staff, as shown in Table 3.1 in Chapter 3. This is also confirmed in a DHET report (2018:3) on the demographic profile of instructional/research professional staff at public universities. According to the report, administrative and support services constituted the largest proportion at 68%, with instruction and research staff at 32%. A Canadian study in 2016 revealed that non-academic staff were less engaged than academic staff, suggesting that non-

academic staff were less satisfied with their job-roles, working environment and organisational support structures than their academic counterparts (Rees-Johnstone 2020:3).

4.3.3 Comparative analysis between the type of employment and academic and administrative staff at the DUT

Table 4.2: Comparison between permanent and contract staff from the academic and administrative/support services personnel category at the DUT (n=198)

TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT	ACADEMIC STAFF		ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF		TOTAL	
	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%
PERMANENT	87	43.93%	78	39.40%	165	83.33%
CONTRACT	16	8.08%	17	8.60%	33	16.67%
TOTAL	103	52%	95	48%	198	100%

Table 4.2 above shows a comparison between permanent and contract staff and academic and administrative/support services staff at the DUT. Results show that 43.93% of the academic staff who responded to the questionnaire are employed on a permanent basis, whilst 8.08% reported that they are employed on a fixed-term contract. Furthermore, 39.40% of the administrative staff reported that they are employed permanently, whilst 8.60% are on contract. A study by Ntisa, Dhurup and Joubert (2016) at the seven UoTs in South Africa established that 51.6% of academics were employed permanently while 48.4% of academics were employed on a fixed-term and part-time basis. In addition, a more recent report by the Department of Higher Education and Training (2018) indicated that the number of permanent instructional/research staff at universities has increased by 54% from 1994 to 2017. However, the report does not provide any data on permanent administrative and support staff at universities.

4.3.4 Gender breakdown of the overall sample respondents at the DUT

Figure 4.3: Analysis of the gender breakdown (n = 198)

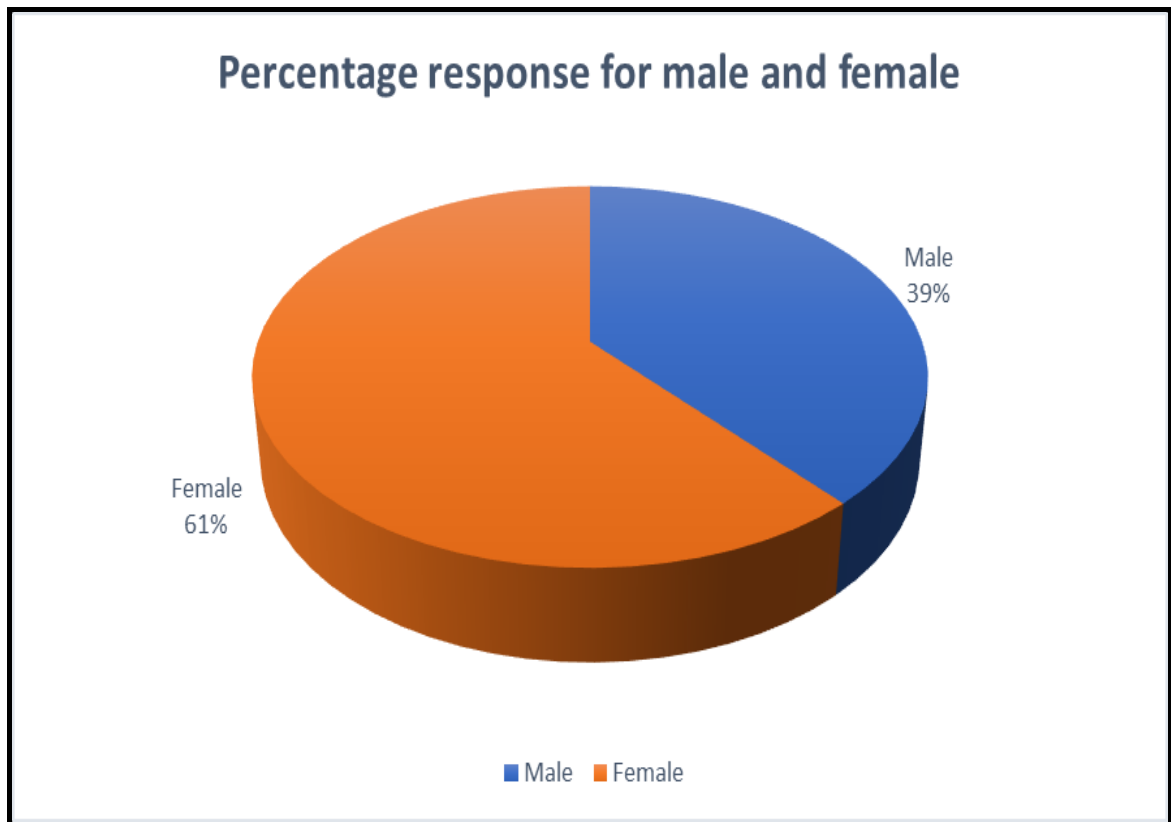


Figure 4.3 displays the gender distribution of all sample respondents. The figures reveal an unequal distribution of males to females (39% and 61% respectively). Figures in the study by Lourens (2016) indicated an equal distribution between males (47%) and females (53%) at the DUT. The current figures indicate a shift towards more female employees being employed than male employees. Setati, Zhuwao, Ngirande and Ndlovu (2019:48) conducted research which suggests that higher education institutions in South Africa should monitor the gender distribution of their workforce, since the perceived job satisfaction of each group is influenced by differing requirements and expectations related to gender.

However, EE research on gender differences produced contradictory and inconclusive results. Several studies (Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova 2006; Chaudhary and Rangnekar 2017; Coetzee and Rothmann 2005; Sharma Goel and Sengupta 2017 cited in Sharma and Rajput 2021) revealed no noticeable difference in the level of EE based on gender. In their scale-validation study with a sample of ten different countries, Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) discovered a highly tenuous and vague correlation between gender and engagement. They discovered that there are no gender-related differences in the engagement level amongst the Australian, Canadian and French samples. However, some earlier studies suggested that the engagement level of female employees tends to be higher than their male counterparts (Avery, McKay and Wilson 2007; Rothbard 2001 cited in Sharma and Rajput 2021). With regard to conflict studies, Holtzhausen (2020) cites various research by Ayub and Jehn (2010), Jehn and Greer (2013), Jehn, Northcraft and Neale (1999) and Pelled (1996), that gender may increase relationship, task and process conflict when members of a particular category group together to the exclusion of others, or because of significantly different backgrounds.

Table 4.3: Comparison of gender and employment category at the DUT (n = 198)

GENDER	ACADEMIC STAFF		ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF		TOTAL	
	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%
MALE	43	21.7%	61	30.8%	104	52.5%
FEMALE	60	30.3%	34	17.2%	94	47.5%
TOTAL	103	52%	95	48%	198	100%

Table 4.3 above displays the results of an additional analysis to compare the percentage of gender breakdown per staff category. The majority of the academic respondents are female at 30.3%, whereas most respondents in the administrative/support category are male at 30.8%. Research by Reissova, Simsova

and Hasova (2017) indicated that no significant gender differences could be identified in relation to EE. Although the study found that women are more loyal to the employer than men, it nevertheless confirmed that men and women held similar attitudes towards engagement. Marcus and Gopinath (2017) agreed with the above researchers, noting that gender had no impact on EE.

4.3.5 Age breakdown of the sample respondents

Figure 4.4: Analysis of the age category of the sample respondents at the DUT (n = 198)

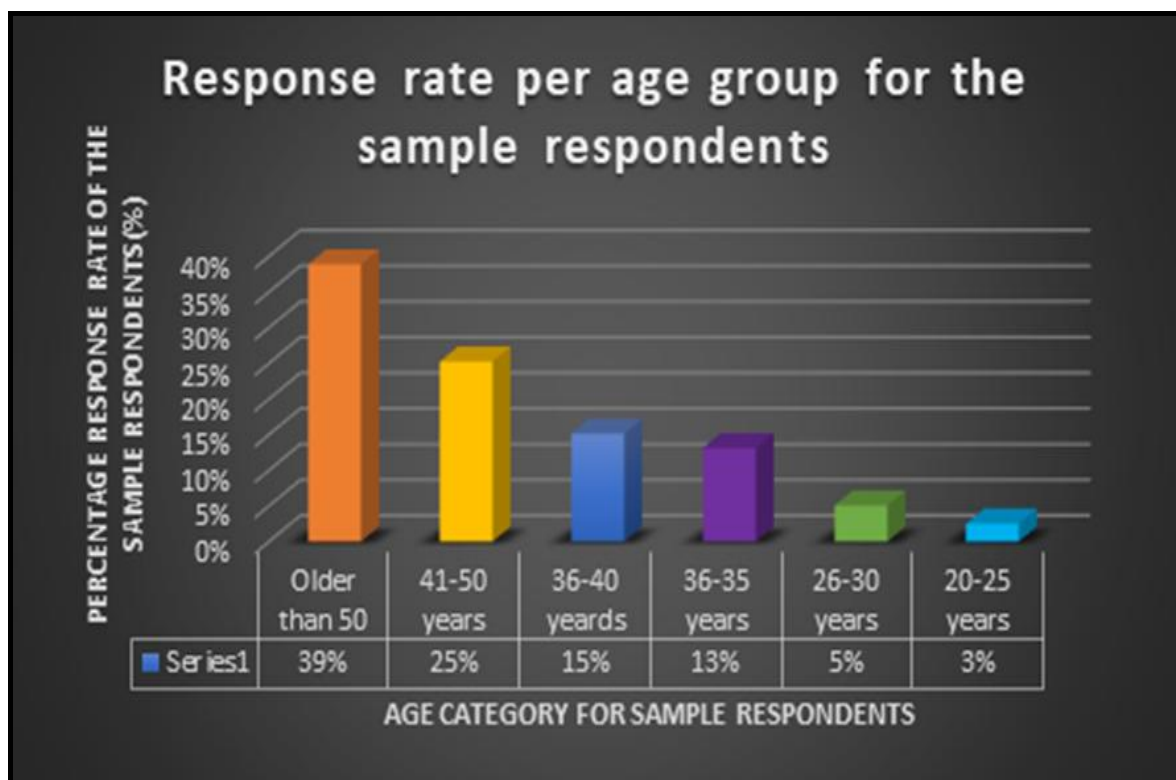


Figure 4.4 indicates the number of responses by the sample respondents per age category for the analysis. As shown by the stacked bar graph in Figure 4.4, most of the sample respondents were above the age of 35 years (157 or 79.29%). The age category representing sample respondents between 36 and 40 years equated to 15.15% of the total number of respondents, while 25.25% fell into the category of

41-50 years of age. A significant proportion of respondents were those above the age of 50 (38.89%). The number of respondents below the age of 36 equated to 41 or 20.71% of the total number of respondents.

Millennials or Generation Y employees fall between the ages of 27 and 42 years old (Jha, Sareen and Potnuru, 2019). Figure 4.4 shows that these employees (categories 26-30, 31-35 and 36-40 years of age) equate to 66 respondents or 33.33% of the total number of respondents. Research by Robyn and Du Preez (2013) indicates that the demographic profile in HE is changing rapidly as older academic and administrative staff retire and are replaced by younger Generation Y (Millennials) staff below the age of 35 years. Understanding the expectations of such employees and promoting employee engagement amongst them presents a critical challenge for HEIs such as the DUT.

According to Chaudhary and Rangnekar's (2017 cited in Sharma and Rajput, 2021:27) study, there are age-related differences in employee engagement levels, with younger employees exhibiting lower levels than older employees. The report identifies this as the reason that young employees - those under the age of 25 - are more inclined to change employment and place a higher value on prospects for career advancement than stability. In a sample of two South African universities, Wissing and Van Eeden (2002 cited in Sharma and Rajput, 2021:26) discovered that older workers had a higher degree of psychological well-being than younger workers. Other studies (cited in Sharma and Rajput, 2021), such as Mostert and Rothmann (2006), Coetzee and de Villiers (2010) and James, Swanberg and McKechnie (2007), demonstrated a significant difference in the level of employee engagement related to the age of employees. Holtzhausen (2020) cites various research by Ayub and Jehn (2010), Jehn, Northcroft and Neale (1999) and Pelled (1996) who found that social category diversity, such as age-related classifications, increases relationship, task and process conflict because of differences in background, or because groups are formed around these differences, thereby excluding others.

4.3.6 Comparative analysis between gender, employment status and age profile of the respondents

Table 4.4: Comparisons between gender, employment status and age profile of the sample respondents at DUT (n = 198)

AGE PROFILE	GENDER									
	MALE				FEMALE					
	CONTRACT		PERMANENT		CONTRACT		PERMANENT		TOTAL	
COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	
20-25 YEARS	2	1.01%	0	-	3	1.52%	0	-	5	2.53%
26-30 YEARS	4	2.02%	1	0.51%	4	2.02%	1	0.51%	10	5.05%
31-35 YEARS	1	0.51%	14	7.07%	4	2.02%	7	3.53%	26	13.13%
36-40 YEARS	1	0.51%	11	5.55%	1	0.51%	17	8.58%	30	15.15%
41-50 YEARS	4	2.02%	14	7.07%	2	1.01%	30	15.15%	50	25.25%
MORE THAN 50 YEARS	5	2.53%	23	11.62%	2	1.01%	47	23.74%	77	38.89%
TOTAL	17	8.58%	63	31.81%	16	8.08%	102	51.51%	198	100%

Table 4.4 presents a comparison between gender, employment status and the reported age profile of the sample respondents. From the table, is evident that 9% (n=18) of the sample respondents (n=198) who were under the age of 35 were employed on contract and 12% (n=23) were employed on a permanent basis. Comparatively, eight percent (n=15) of the sample respondents who were over the age of 35 were employed on contract, while 72% (n=142) of those over the age of 35 were employed on a permanent basis. From these statistics, the percentage of staff employed on contract was slightly higher for those under the age of 35 (9%) compared to those over the age of 35 (8%), while the percentage of staff employed on a permanent basis was higher for those above the age of 35 (72%) compared to those under the age of 35 (12%).

4.3.7 Period of employment of the sample respondents

Figure 4.5: Analysis of length of service (n = 198)

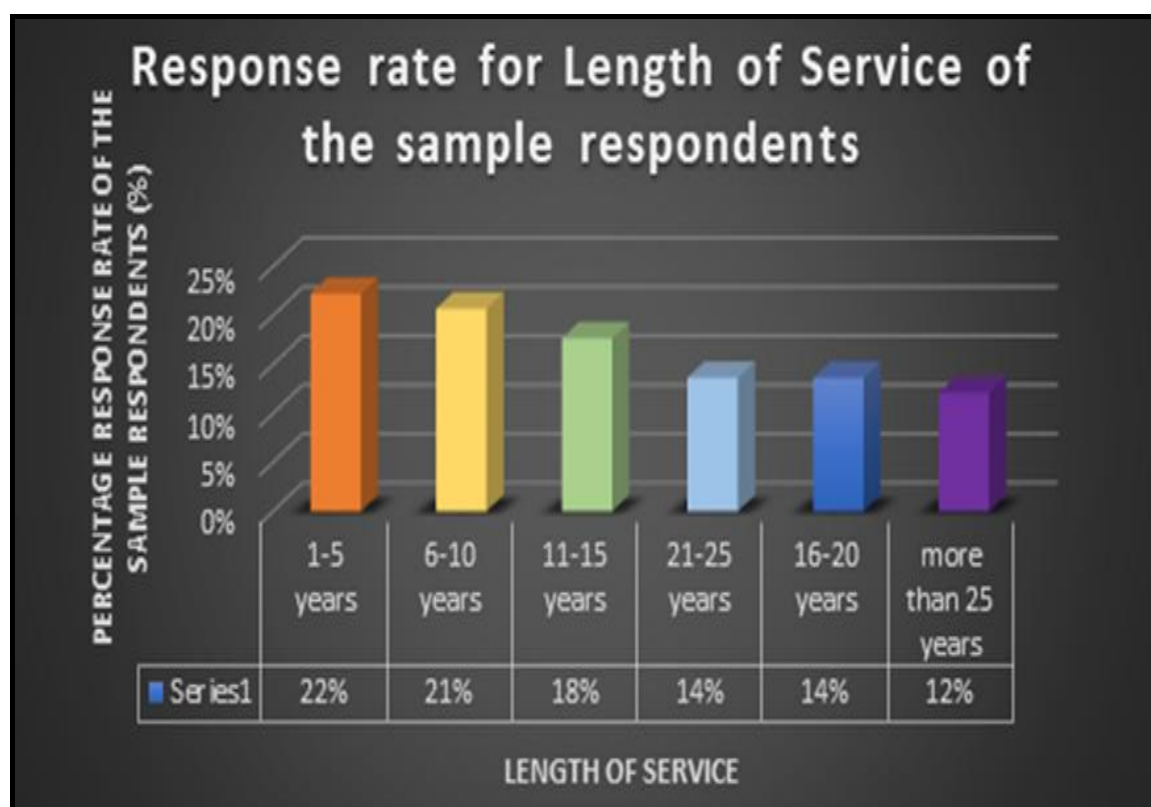


Figure 4.5 shows the length of service of the sample respondents. The highest percentage reported was for those employed between 1 to 5 years (22.22% or 44 respondents). The majority of respondents reported that they have been employed at the DUT for more than 10 years (57.08%). A study by Xu and Copper-Thomas (2011 cited in Sharma and Rajput 2021) from amongst a sample of employees working for an insurance company in New Zealand, found no relationship between work engagement and years of service. However, Coetzee and Rothmann's (2005 cited in Lourens, 2016) study at the Vaal University of Technology examined the effects of years of service on employee commitment and work-related stress. When compared to employees who had worked at the institution for more than ten years, their data showed that the profile of employees who had been there for fewer than five years was far greater. Workers in the higher education industry with more than 15 years of experience, according to Johnson, Louw and Smit (2010 cited in Lourens 2016), run the risk of becoming complacent and experiencing burnout, which lowers engagement and commitment to the organisation.

A study by Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004 cited in Sharma and Rajput, 2021) found that employees in their first year of service tended to be highly engaged, but that this decreased markedly as years of service increased and they became permanent. Based on the findings of these studies, it may be expected that in the current study (Figure 4.5), respondents who had worked for the organisation for fewer than six years (22.22%) could be more inclined to engage actively in DUT procedures and structures. However, based on the evidence in Figure 4.5 above, the percentage of respondents with less than 10 years of service (42.92% or 85 respondents) was still lower than those with more than ten years of service (57.08% or 113 respondents). Therefore, in relation to the research by Johnson, Louw and Smit (2010), the DUT may still be faced with challenges related to the engagement of its staff.

4.3.8 Level of qualification

Figure 4.6: Analysis of level of qualification (n = 198)

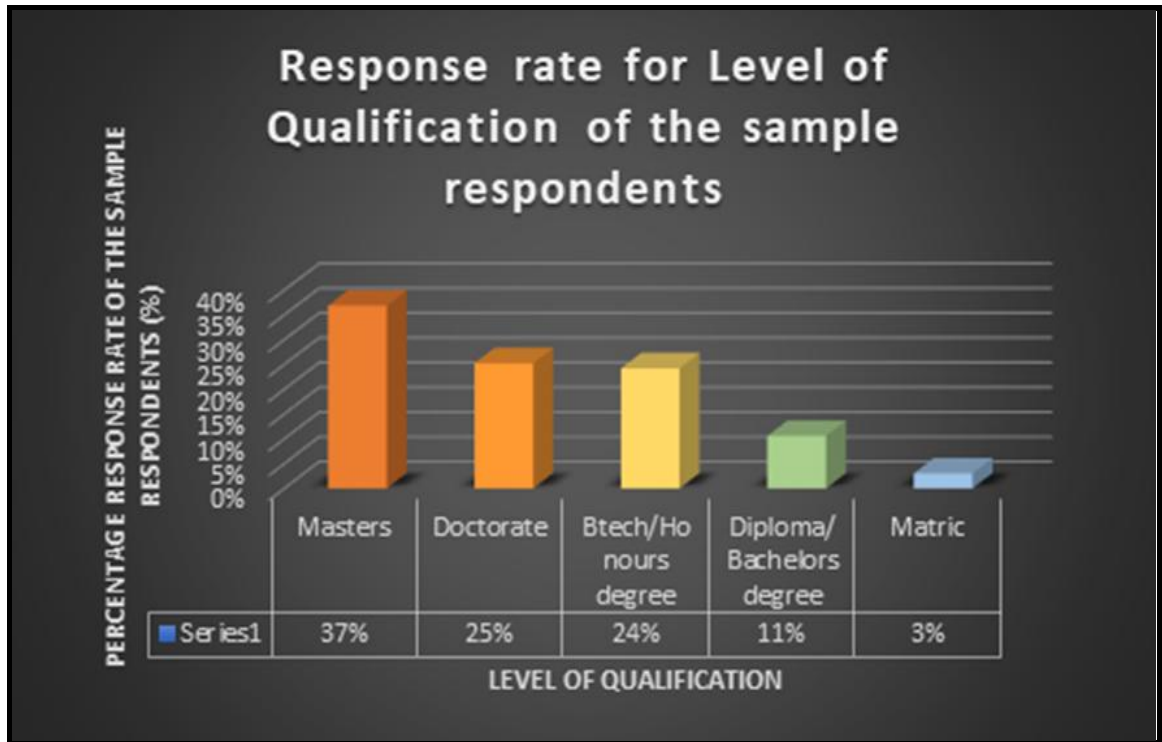


Figure 4.6 shows the level of qualifications of the sample respondents. Of the total number of respondents, 37% (n=73) had masters, 25% (n=50) had doctorates, 24% (n=48) had either a Btech or honours degree, 11% (n=21) had a diploma or bachelor's degree, and 3% (n=6) had a matric (Grade 12 certificate). Most respondents (62%; n=123) had either a master's or doctorate (PhD) degree.

According to Sharma and Rajput (2021), studies by Avery, McKay and Wilson (2007), Chaudhary and Rangnekar (2017), and Sharma and Rajput (2017) have all found no correlation between an employee's level of education and their level of engagement. On the other hand, Garg (2014 cited in Sharma and Rajput 2021) discovered a negative correlation between employee engagement and educational qualification in studies of various industries in India. Studies have also shown that

differences in educational background (levels of qualification) contribute to higher levels of task and process conflict in the workplace (Jehn, Chadwick and Thatcher, 1997; Pelled, Eisenhardt and Xin, 1999 cited in Holtzhausen, 2020:177).

4.4 SECTION B: ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND WORKPLACE CONFLICT

The responses to Section B (Annexure B) focus on the descriptive analysis and relevant non-parametric tests, which provide an overview of the perceptions relating to Employee Engagement and Workplace Conflict.

4.4.1 Summary responses in relation to employee engagement

Table 4.5 summarises the frequency response rate for Section B of the Questionnaire (Annexure B) related to employee engagement in accordance with the response Options of the Likert scale, namely strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The salient findings reported by the respondents are as follows:

Table 4.5: Section B: Frequencies expressed as a percentage in relation to employee engagement (n = 198)

STATEMENT	RESPONSES	RESPONSE OPTIONS					TOTAL
		STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	
8.1. I know what is expected of me at work.	COUNT	3	0	5	92	98	198
	%	1.5%	-	2.5%	46.5%	49.5%	100%
8.2 I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.	COUNT	10	24	26	106	32	198
	%	5.1%	12.1%	13.1%	53.5%	16.2%	100%
8.3 I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.	COUNT	5	30	25	95	43	198
	%	2.5%	15.2%	12.6%	48.0%	21.7%	100%
8.4 In the last 7 days I have received recognition and praise for doing good work.	COUNT	48	54	41	37	18	198
	%	24.2%	27.3%	20.7%	18.7%	9.1%	100%
8.5 My supervisor/HOD at work seems to care about me as a person.	COUNT	26	21	34	63	54	198
	%	13.1%	10.6%	17.2%	31.8%	27.3%	100%
8.6 There is someone at work who encourages my development.	COUNT	21	26	35	79	37	198
	%	10.6%	13.1%	17.7%	39.9%	18.7%	100%
8.7 At work my opinions seem to count.	COUNT	16	28	43	74	37	198
	%	8.1%	14.1%	21.7%	37.4%	18.7%	100%
8.8 The vision and mission of the institution makes me feel as though my job is important.	COUNT	23	15	41	92	27	198
	%	11.6%	7.6%	20.7%	46.5%	13.6%	100%
8.9 My fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	COUNT	20	17	50	85	26	198
	%	10.1%	8.6%	25.3%	42.9%	13.1%	100%
8.10 I have a best friend at work.	COUNT	36	38	59	40	25	198
	%	18.2%	19.2%	29.8%	20.2%	12.6%	100%
8.11 In the last 6 months someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	COUNT	32	38	34	76	18	198
	%	16.2%	19.2%	17.2%	38.3%	9.1%	100%
8.12 In the past 12 months I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	COUNT	16	23	40	85	34	198
	%	8.1%	11.6%	20.2%	42.9%	17.2%	100%
8.13 I trust my colleagues at DUT.	COUNT	34	26	60	58	20	198
	%	17.2%	13.1%	30.3%	29.3%	10.1%	100%
8.14 I am constantly undermined by my fellow employees at DUT.	COUNT	51	68	45	25	9	198
	%	25.8%	34.3%	22.7%	12.6%	4.6%	100%
8.15 My current job is cognitively demanding since it requires constant concentration.	COUNT	2	18	20	86	72	198
	%	1.0%	9.1%	10.1%	43.4%	36.4%	100%

8.16 I believe that the leadership of the DUT values employees' involvement in the objectives of the institution	COUNT	25	30	68	63	12	198
	%	12.6%	15.2%	34.3%	31.8%	6.1%	100%
8.17 I have a positive attitude towards my job	COUNT	7	10	20	90	71	198
	%	3.5%	5.1%	10.1%	45.4%	35.9%	100%
8.18 Although there is sometimes negative media coverage about the DUT, I am proud to be associated with the Institution.	COUNT	7	16	39	93	43	198
	%	3.5%	8.1%	19.7%	47.0%	21.7%	100%
8.19 Leadership at the DUT makes a concerted effort to improve the working conditions of staff.	COUNT	39	43	61	48	7	198
	%	19.7%	21.7%	30.8%	24.2%	3.6%	100%
8.20 I can use a variety of skills and knowledge in my current position.	COUNT	6	5	24	119	44	198
	%	3.0%	2.6%	12.1%	60.1%	22.2%	100%
9.1 If I have challenges in my current job, my line manager is supportive in assisting me	COUNT	20	23	29	86	40	198
	%	10.1%	11.6%	14.7%	43.4%	20.2%	100%
9.2 In my current position, I have the autonomy to solve problems	COUNT	5	23	29	108	33	198
	%	2.5%	11.6%	14.7%	54.5%	16.7%	100%
9.17 I often stay away from work even though I am not sick	COUNT	129	46	12	7	4	198
	%	65.2%	23.2%	6.1%	3.5%	2.0%	100%
9.18 My line manager provides me with regular feedback on my performance.	COUNT	36	50	37	62	13	198
	%	18.2%	25.3%	18.7%	31.3%	6.5%	100%
9.20 The DUT places enough emphasis on employee-wellbeing (e.g. managing workplace stress and challenges).	COUNT	31	40	66	52	9	198
	%	15.7%	20.2%	33.3%	26.3%	4.5%	100%
10.1 Often, I feel as if my voice is not heard at the DUT	COUNT	10	43	53	61	31	198
	%	5.1%	21.7%	26.8%	30.8%	15.6%	100%
10.2 I know exactly what is expected of me on a daily basis at the DUT	COUNT	4	6	21	115	52	198
	%	2.0%	3.0%	10.6%	58.1%	26.3%	100%
10.3 I believe that the DUT undertakes pro-active planning and involves staff in this process.	COUNT	29	43	73	47	6	198
	%	14.6%	21.7%	37.0%	23.7%	3.0%	100%
10.4 I believe that leadership development is a priority at the DUT	COUNT	15	39	60	62	22	198
	%	7.6%	19.7%	30.3%	31.3%	11.1%	100%
10.5 The current communication processes at the DUT are suited to the rapid changes that the Institution is facing.	COUNT	22	44	70	54	8	198
	%	11.1%	22.2%	35.4%	27.3%	4.0%	100%
10.6 I believe that joint decision making at the Institution does not receive the attention it deserves.	COUNT	6	17	74	78	23	198
	%	3.0%	8.6%	37.4%	39.4%	11.6%	100%
10.7 The culture of the DUT promotes shared responsibility	COUNT	21	47	65	60	5	198
	%	10.6%	23.7%	32.8%	30.3%	2.6%	100%
10.8 Although staff at the DUT are encouraged to participate in decision making, there is a general climate of distancing oneself from these processes.	COUNT	9	24	70	74	21	198
	%	4.5%	12.1%	35.4%	37.4%	10.6%	100%

10.9 DUT regards professional development as an individual responsibility and not that of the Institution.	COUNT	8	40	48	76	26	198
	%	4.0%	20.2%	24.2%	38.4%	13.2%	100%
10.10 My workload has doubled in the last five years	COUNT	6	35	42	60	55	198
	%	3.0%	17.7%	21.2%	30.3%	27.8%	100%
10.11 I often struggle with work-related stress	COUNT	9	57	37	73	22	198
	%	4.5%	28.8%	18.7%	36.9%	11.1%	100%
10.12 In my experience I have received sufficient coaching at the DUT to fully understand what is expected of me in my present job.	COUNT	24	41	52	71	10	198
	%	12.1%	20.7%	26.2%	35.9%	5.1%	100%
10.13 I believe that a mentorship programme will benefit staff at the DUT	COUNT	5	4	31	87	71	198
	%	2.5%	2.0%	15.7%	43.9%	35.9%	100%
10.14 I am motivated to do my best on a daily basis	COUNT	7	17	42	87	45	198
	%	3.5%	8.6%	21.2%	44.0%	22.7%	100%
10.15 In my opinion the salary structure of the DUT is equitable in comparison to other Higher Education Institutions.	COUNT	41	30	82	38	7	198
	%	20.7%	15.2%	41.4%	19.2%	3.5%	100%
10.16 I feel motivated by the career opportunities provided at the DUT	COUNT	28	56	49	57	8	198
	%	14.1%	28.3%	24.8%	28.8%	4.0%	100%
10.17 Performance is measured fairly at the DUT	COUNT	50	55	67	21	5	198
	%	25.3%	27.8%	33.8%	10.6%	2.5%	100%
10.18 Innovation is emphasised at the DUT	COUNT	14	22	47	88	27	198
	%	7.2%	11.1%	23.7%	44.4%	13.6%	100%
10.19 I often feel stressed because of the performance targets that I am expected to achieve.	COUNT	14	41	56	62	25	198
	%	7.1%	20.7%	28.3%	31.3%	12.6%	100%
10.20 The current infrastructure at the DUT is hampering my performance	COUNT	12	38	66	47	35	198
	%	6.1%	19.2%	33.3%	23.7%	17.7%	100%
11.1 I will not hesitate to recommend the DUT to anyone seeking employment	COUNT	23	30	45	84	16	198
	%	11.6%	15.2%	22.7%	42.4%	8.1%	100%
11.2 I will definitely recommend the DUT as a Higher Education Institution to anyone wishing to further their studies.	COUNT	17	19	49	86	27	198
	%	8.6%	9.6%	24.8%	43.4%	13.6%	100%
11.3 I am excited to go to work on a daily basis since I regard my job as meaningful.	COUNT	13	18	38	91	38	198
	%	6.5%	9.1%	19.2%	46.0%	19.2%	100%
11.4 I often think of resigning from DUT or looking for alternative employment.	COUNT	38	60	41	30	29	198
	%	19.2%	30.3%	20.7%	15.2%	14.6%	100%
11.5 One of the main reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice	COUNT	28	28	56	55	31	198
	%	14.1%	14.1%	28.3%	27.8%	15.7%	100%

As reflected in Table 4.5 above, most respondents (96%) agreed that they know what is expected of them at work, whilst only 1.5% disagreed (**Statement 8.1**). In addition, 84.4% stated that they know exactly what is expected of them daily at the DUT, whilst only 5% disagreed (**Statement 10.2**). However, only 41% of the sample respondents agreed that they have received sufficient coaching at the DUT to fully understand what is expected of them in their present job, whilst 32.8% disagreed (**Statement 10.12**). With reference to **Statement 8.20**, an overwhelming majority of the sample respondents (82.3%) indicated that they can use a variety of skills and knowledge in their current jobs, whilst only 5.6% disagreed. This correlates with similar responses to **Statement 8.3**, where most respondents (69.7%) stated that they can perform at their best every day whilst only 17.7% disagreed, and **Statement 10.18**, where the majority of respondents (58%) agreed that the DUT emphasises and encourages innovation whilst 18.3% disagreed.

Most respondents (81.3%) also indicated that they have a positive attitude towards their job, whilst 8.6% disagreed (**Statement 8.17**) and 66.7% indicated that they are motivated to do their best on a daily basis, whilst 12.1% disagreed (**Statement 10.14**). This correlates with most respondents (65.2%) indicating that they are excited to go to work on a daily basis as they regard their job as meaningful, whilst 15.6% disagreed (**Statement 11.3**). However, 48% of respondents indicated that they struggle with work-related stress, whilst 33.3% disagreed (**Statement 10.11**). In addition, only 32.8% of respondents feel motivated by the career opportunities provided at the DUT, whilst 42.4% do not feel motivated (**Statement 10.16**). Most respondents (79.8%) agreed that their current job is cognitively demanding as it requires constant concentration, whilst only 10.1% disagreed (**Statement 8.15**). Regarding **Statement 10.10**, 58.1% agreed that their workload has increased in the last five years, whilst 20.7% disagreed and 21.2% remained neutral.

Most respondents (79.8%) agreed that a mentorship programme will benefit staff at the DUT, whilst only 4.5% disagreed (**Statement 10.13**). In addition, 63.6% of respondents agreed that if they have challenges in their job, their line manager is

supportive in assisting them, whilst 21.7% disagreed (**Statement 9.1**). Most respondents (59.1%) also agreed that their supervisor/HOD seems to care about them as a person, whilst 23.7% disagreed (**Statement 8.5**). In addition, most respondents (58.6%) agreed that there is someone at work who encourages their development, whilst 23.7% disagreed (**Statement 8.6**). However, only 37.8% of respondents agreed that their line manager provides them with regular feedback on their performance, whilst 43.5% disagreed (**Statement 9.18**).

In relation to **Statement 9.2**, most respondents (71.2%) agreed that they have autonomy to solve problems in their job, whilst 14.1% disagreed. Most respondents (69.7%) agreed that they are provided with the materials and equipment to perform their jobs correctly, whilst only 17.2% disagreed (**Statement 8.2**). However, 41.4% of respondents stated that the current infrastructure at the DUT hampers their performance, whilst 25.3% disagreed with the statement (**Statement 10.20**). Regarding **Statement 8.19**, 41.4% of respondents disagreed that the leadership at the DUT makes a concerted effort to improve the working conditions of staff, whilst only 27.8% agreed. With reference to **Statement 8.18**, most respondents (68.7%) agreed that despite the negative media coverage about the DUT, they are still proud to be associated with the institution, whilst only 11.6% disagreed. This is supported by the responses to **Statement 11.1**, where the respondents indicated that they will not hesitate to recommend the DUT to anyone seeking employment (50.5% agreed and 26.8% disagreed) and **Statement 11.2** where they also indicated that they will recommend the DUT as a higher education institution to anyone wishing to further their studies (57% agreed), while only 26.8% disagreed.

Most respondents (60.1%) agreed with **Statement 8.12**, that in the past 12 months they have had the opportunity to learn and grow, whilst only 19.7% disagreed. Additionally, 42.4% of respondents agree that leadership development is a priority at the DUT, whilst 27.3% disagree (**Statement 10.4**). Interestingly, 51.6% of respondents agreed with the statement that the DUT regards professional development as an individual responsibility and not that of the institution, whilst

24.2% disagreed (**Statement 10.9**). In response to **Statement 8.14** that they are constantly undermined by their fellow employees at the DUT, most respondents (60.1%) disagreed, whilst 17.2% agreed and 22.7% remained neutral. Related to this, most respondents (56%) also agreed that their colleagues are committed to doing quality work, whilst only 18.7% disagreed and 25.3% remaining neutral (**Statement 8.9**). However, only 39.49% of respondents indicated that they trusted their colleagues, whilst 30.3% stated they did not and 30.3% remained neutral (**Statement 8.13**). Additionally, only 32.8% of respondents agreed that they have a best friend at work, whilst 37.4% disagreed (**Statement 8.10**)

In response to **Statement 8.8**, 59.1% of respondents agreed that the vision and mission of the institution makes them feel as though their job is important, whilst 19.2% disagreed with the statement. In response to **Statement 8.16**, 37.9% of respondents agreed that the leadership of the DUT values employee involvement in the objectives of the institution, whilst 27.8% disagreed and 34.3% remained neutral. In addition, only 26.7% of respondents agreed that the DUT undertakes pro-active planning and involves staff in the process, whilst 36.3% disagreed and 36.9% remained neutral (**Statement 10.3**). This correlates with the responses to **Statement 10.1** in which 46.4% of respondents agreed that their voice is not always heard, whilst 26.8% disagreed. Regarding **Statements 10.7** and **10.8**, similar sentiments were expressed. In response to **Statement 10.7**, 32.9% of respondents agreed with the statement that the culture of the DUT promotes shared responsibility, whilst 34.3% disagreed and 32.8% remained neutral. In addition, in response to **Statement 10.8**, 48% of respondents reported that they were not committed to the joint decision-making process despite being encouraged to do so by the institution, whilst 16.6% disagreed and 35.4% remained neutral.

Interestingly, regarding **Statement 10.6**, 51% of respondents agreed that joint decision-making at the institution does not receive the attention it deserves, whilst 11.6% disagreed and 37.4% remained neutral. However, responses to **Statement 8.7** reflected that most respondents (56.1%) agreed that their opinions seem to count

at work, whilst 22.2% disagreed. Most respondents (51.5%) disagreed with **Statement 8.4**, thereby implying that in the last 7 days they had not received recognition and praise for doing good work, whilst 27.8% agreed. Regarding **Statement 10.17**, 53.1% disagreed that performance was measured fairly at the DUT, whilst 13.1% agreed and 33.8% remained neutral. Similarly, 43.9% stated that they often feel stressed because of the performance targets that they are expected to achieve, whilst 27.8% disagreed (**Statement 10.19**). In response to **Statement 9.18**, 37.8% agreed that their line manager provides them with regular performance feedback, whilst 43.5% disagreed. In addition, 48% of respondents also reported that they suffer with work-related stress, whilst 33.3% disagreed (**Statement 10.11**).

In response to **Statement 8.11**, 47.4% of respondents agreed that in the last 6 months, someone at work has talked to them about their progress, whilst 35.4% disagreed. Interestingly, only 22.7% of respondents agreed with **Statement 10.15** that they think the salary structure of the DUT is equitable in comparison to other HEIs, whilst 35.9% disagreed and 41.4% remained neutral. The high neutral responses could be attributed to a reluctance to take a position on this issue or a lack of awareness regarding comparative salaries between the DUT and other HEIs in South Africa. According to **Statement 9.17**, 88.4% of respondents disagreed with the statement that “I often stay away from work even if I am not sick”, whilst 5.55% agreed. In response to **Statement 11.4**, 49.5% of respondents reported that they did not often think of resigning from the institution, whilst 29.8% reported that they did. However, 43.5% agreed that one of the main reasons they continue to work for the institution is that resigning would require considerable personal sacrifice, whilst 28.2% disagreed (**Statement 11.5**).

4.4.2 Summary of responses in relation to workplace conflict

Table 4.6 summarises the frequency response rate for Section B of the Questionnaire (Annexure B), namely Workplace Conflict. The salient findings reported by the respondents are as follows:

Table 4.6: Section B: Frequencies expressed as a percentage in relation to workplace conflict (n = 198)

STATEMENT	RESPONSES	RESPONSE OPTIONS					TOTAL
		STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEUTRAL	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE	
9.3 Workplace conflict takes up a lot of time at DUT	COUNT	11	51	69	38	29	198
	%	5.6%	25.8%	34.8%	19.2%	14.6%	100%
9.4 The processes to manage conflict are well known to all at DUT	COUNT	27	61	68	33	9	198
	%	13.6%	30.8%	34.3%	16.7%	4.6%	100%
9.5 I am often fearful of conflict situations since I am afraid to be victimised later by management.	COUNT	21	47	53	45	32	198
	%	10.6%	23.7%	26.8%	22.7%	16.2%	100%
9.6 The workplace conflict management structures at the DUT can resolve problems within a reasonable timeframe.	COUNT	38	41	98	18	3	198
	%	19.2%	20.7%	49.5%	9.1%	1.5%	100%
9.7 I often experience frustration in my present job due to the inability of my colleagues.	COUNT	22	69	40	44	23	198
	%	11.1%	34.9%	20.2%	22.2%	11.6%	100%
9.8 I get frustrated daily as a result of a lack of infrastructure at the DUT to support me in my present job.	COUNT	17	54	39	44	44	198
	%	8.6%	27.3%	19.7%	22.2%	22.2%	100%
9.9 In my opinion racial differences play an important role in conflict at the DUT	COUNT	14	46	60	53	25	198
	PERCENTAGE	7.1%	23.2%	30.3%	26.8%	12.6%	100%
9.10 I often regard cultural differences at the DUT as a cause for conflict	COUNT	18	50	70	46	14	198
	%	9.1%	25.2%	35.4%	23.2%	7.1%	100%
9.11 The grievance process as a conflict management tool at the DUT is effective	COUNT	26	41	107	21	3	198
	%	13.1%	20.7%	54.0%	10.6%	1.6%	100%
9.12 In my opinion, line managers resort to disciplinary action to quickly without first communicating with an employee.	COUNT	17	51	83	30	17	198
	%	8.5%	25.8%	41.9%	15.2%	8.6%	100%
9.13 I believe the DUT provides line managers with sufficient training in how to handle conflict situations	COUNT	45	51	62	34	6	198
	%	22.7%	25.8%	31.3%	17.2%	3.0%	100%
9.14 In my opinion, the unions at the DUT provide adequate support if there is a conflict situation.	COUNT	32	41	82	33	10	198
	%	16.1%	20.7%	41.4%	16.7%	5.1%	100%
9.15 I believe that line managers at DUT often abuse their power resulting in conflict situations to arise.	COUNT	15	36	73	48	26	198
	%	7.6%	18.2%	36.9%	24.2%	13.1%	100%
9.16 DUT Management does not make a concerted effort to resolve conflict timeously and often allows it to escalate.	COUNT	10	30	86	48	24	198
	%	5.1%	15.2%	43.4%	24.2%	12.1%	100%
9.19 In my opinion, the leadership of the Institution tends to abuse their power when dealing with staff.	COUNT	19	28	80	43	28	198
	%	9.6%	14.1%	40.4%	21.8%	14.1%	100%

Regarding Table 4.6, of the 15 statements relating to workplace conflict, none of the responses (disagree, neutral and agree) were above 50%, except for **Statement 9.11** (neutral: 54%). **Statement 9.11** (54%) was also the highest percentage of responses when compared to all other statement responses related to the section on workplace conflict. In addition, neutral responses were the highest percentage in eight (8) of the 15 statements (9.3; 9.6; 9.10; 9.11; 9.12; 9.14; 9.16; 9.19). This may indicate a lack of a strong opinion towards the topic overall, or that respondents may be reluctant to answer. It may also indicate a lack of familiarity with the overall topic and related questions. However, it should be noted that this did not affect the reliability and validity of the responses overall, as reflected in the inferential statistics discussed later. There were only four (4) statements where most of the respondents agreed with the statement, namely statements 9.5, 9.8, 9.9 and 9.15, and three (3) statements where most of the respondents disagreed with the statement, namely statements 9.4, 9.7 and 9.13.

Regarding **Statement 9.11**, only 12.2% of respondents agreed that the grievance process is an effective conflict management tool at the DUT, whilst 33.8% disagreed and 54% remained neutral. Such a high number of neutral responses to this statement may possibly be attributed to respondents either not being familiar with the grievance process at the DUT, or its effectiveness as a conflict management tool. Regarding **Statement 9.4**, only 21.3% of the respondents agreed that the processes to manage conflict are well known to all at DUT, whilst 44.4% disagreed with the statement and 34.8% remained neutral. In addition, 38.9% of respondents stated they are often fearful of conflict situations as they are afraid of being victimised later by management, whilst 34.3% disagreed and 26.8% remained neutral (**Statement 9.5**).

In response to **Statement 9.3**, there was not much difference between the responses (agree, neutral and disagree), with 33.8% of respondents agreeing that workplace conflict is time-consuming at the DUT; 31.4% disagreeing with the statement and 34.8% remaining neutral. Interestingly, with regard to **Statement 9.6**

on whether workplace conflict management structures at the DUT can resolve problems within a reasonable timeframe, only 10.6% agreed with the statement, whilst 39.9% disagreed and a very high 49.5% remained neutral. This is a similarly high neutral response to **Statement 9.11**, which deals with a related issue and therefore could be explained as above. This could also point to respondents or possibly some DUT staff not being very familiar with the conflict resolution structures at the DUT and therefore not wanting to take a position on the issue. Linked to this is **Statement 9.16**, where 36.3% of respondents agreed that the management of the DUT does not make a concerted effort to resolve conflict timeously and often allows it to escalate, whilst 20.3% disagreed, and 43.4% remained neutral. One could also explain this as above (see statement 9.11).

According to 48.5% of respondents, the DUT does not provide line managers with sufficient training in handling conflict situations, whilst 20.2% agree that the DUT does provide sufficient training in conflict handling, and 31.8% remained neutral (**Statement 9.13**). However, only 23.8% of respondents agreed that line managers resort to disciplinary action too quickly without first communicating with an employee, whilst 34.3% disagreed and 41.9% remained neutral (**Statement 9.12**). A very high number of neutral responses could indicate a reluctance to respond to this issue for fear of victimisation, despite the confidentiality of the process.

Responses to **Statements 9.15 and 9.19** were similar, with 37.3% agreeing that line-managers at the DUT often abuse their power, resulting in conflict situations arising (**Statement 9.15**), and 35.9% agreeing that the leadership of the institution tends to abuse their power when dealing with staff (**Statement 9.19**). Similarly, 25.8% and 23.7% disagreed with the respective statements, while 36.9% and 40.4% respectively remained neutral. **Statement 9.19** deals with the possible abuse of power by line-managers. The high neutral response rate could be similarly explained as in **Statement 9.12** above. In response to **Statement 9.7**, 33.8% agreed that they often experience frustration in their present jobs due to the *inability of their colleagues*, whilst 46% disagreed, and only 20.2% remained neutral. However,

44.4% indicated that they get frustrated daily due to the lack of infrastructure at the DUT to support them in their present job, whilst 35.9% disagreed (**Statement 9.8**).

According to **Statement 9.9**, 39.4% of respondents agreed that racial differences play an important role in conflicts at the DUT, whilst 30.3% disagreed and the same percentage remained neutral. Additionally, 30.3% felt that cultural differences at the DUT are a cause of conflict, whilst 34.3% disagreed and 35.4% remained neutral (**Statement 9.10**). Regarding **Statement 9.14** on whether unions at the DUT provide adequate support in a conflict situation, 21.8% of respondents agreed, whilst 36.8% disagreed and 41.4% remained neutral. The high neutral responses could be related to the possibility that some respondents have never required the union for any conflict resolution or may not belong to any union. Alternatively, they could be reluctant to give an opinion on the matter.

4.4.3 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a multivariate statistical technique that reduces the number of observed variables to a small number of latent variables known as factors (Nicol and Pexman, 2010:67). It is a strategy for determining how closely connected items are to one another and how variables cluster together based on their shared characteristics. In certain research, factors outperform individual variables at representing outcomes because they represent several variables. When utilising this strategy, the idea is to give items that are related to one another a more generic term, like a factor. Groups of variables are named according to their content and the ideas underlying their associations (Salkind and Frey, 2021:300). There are two common types of Factor Analyses. These include (i) Exploratory Factor Analysis, and (ii) Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) involves developing a hypothesis Regarding potential links between variables. This strategy may be used if a researcher does not know what to expect in terms of factors. Exploratory factor analysis ultimately helps in determining how many factors are present in the data and what the skeleton of the factors may resemble (Gell, 2024:5).

The factor analysis method was utilised to establish which set of items in the EE construct of the questionnaire (Annexure B) needed to be grouped together in relation to respondents answering these questions, similarly, thereby measuring the same Factor. The same approach was used for the workplace conflict construct. This will be discussed in detail below. Alternatively, the factor analysis can also be used later to drop a set of items in a dataset. In the current study, Exploratory Factor Analysis was used to identify various interrelationships between items that make up a combined theory.

4.4.3.1 Factor analysis for employee engagement

Table 4.7: Employee engagement strategies and interventions–factor loadings

Statements	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
8.5 My supervisor/HOD at work seems to care about me as a person.	.976			
9.1 If I have challenges in my current job, my line manager is supportive in assisting me	.865			
8.8 The vision and mission of the institution makes me feel as though my job is important	.813			
9.18 My line manager provides me with regular feedback on my performance	.783			
8.6 There is someone at work who encourages my development	.782			
9.2 In my current position, I have the autonomy to solve problems	.662			
8.13 I trust my colleagues at DUT	.584			
8.4 In the last 7 days I have received recognition and praise for doing good work.	.571			
8.11 In the last 6 months someone at work has talked to me about my progress	.568			
8.14 I am NOT constantly undermined by my fellow employees at DUT	.518			
8.12 In the past 12 months I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow	.496			
8.9 My fellow employees are committed to doing quality work	.433			
8.16 I believe that the leadership of the DUT values employees' involvement in the objectives of the institution		.770		
10.5 The current communication processes at the DUT are suited to the rapid changes that the institution is facing		.770		
10.7 The culture of the DUT promotes shared responsibility		.748		
8.19 Leadership at the DUT makes a concerted effort to improve the working conditions of staff		.689		
10.17 Performance is measured fairly at the DUT		.683		
10.18 Innovation is emphasised at the DUT		.611		
10.16 I feel motivated by the career opportunities provided at the DUT		.607		
8.7 At work my opinions seem to count		.575		
9.20 The DUT places enough emphasis on employee well-being (e.g managing workplace stress and challenges)		.527		
10.4 I believe that leadership development is a priority at the DUT		.527		
10.3 I believe that the DUT undertakes pro-active planning and involves staff in this process		.468		
10.19 I often feel stressed because of the performance targets that I am expected to achieve			.745	
10.11 I often struggle with work-related stress			.699	
10.20 The current infrastructure at the DUT is hampering my performance			.634	
9.8 I get frustrated daily as a result of a lack of infrastructure at the DUT to support me in my present job			.546	
10.10 My workload has doubled in the last five years			.537	
10.2 I know exactly what is expected of me on a daily basis at the DUT				.804
8.1 I know what is expected of me at work.				.672
8.17 I have a positive attitude towards my job				.612
8.3 I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.				.552
11.3 I am excited to go to work on a daily basis since I regard my job as meaningful				.301

* indicates a reverse-coded item

In the study, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Promax rotation was applied to the 43 items measuring employee engagement and its strategies and interventions. Several items were dropped because they did not load strongly enough onto any factor or cross-loaded onto multiple factors. Four factors were extracted, which account for 47.19% of the variance in the data. The four factors identified include Employee Support (SUPP), Institutional Work Culture (INS), Job-related stressors (JOB), and Employee Engagement (EE). A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) of 0.897 and a significant Bartlett's test indicates that the data was adequate for successful and reliable extraction. The extracted factors and the item loadings are summarised in Table 4.7. Four themes (Employee support, Institutional work culture, Job-related stressors, and Employee Engagement) were also identified from Table 4.7. Twelve items were extracted for the Employee support theme (8.4; 8.5; 8.6; 8.8; 8.9; 8.11; 8.12; 8.13; 8.14; 9.1; 9.2; 9.18), eleven items for the Institutional work culture theme (8.7; 8.16; 8.19; 9.20; 10.3; 10.4; 10.5; 10.7; 10.16; 10.17; 10.18), five items for the Job-related stressors theme (9.8; 10.10; 10.11; 10.19; 10.20), and five items for the employee engagement theme (8.1; 8.3; 8.17; 10.2; 11.3). The reliability and validity of the four themes (SUPP; INS; JOB; and EE) will be outlined in the table below. Details of the extracted factor are shown in Table 4.8 below.

Table 4.8: Summary of exploratory factor analysis-employee engagement, EE strategies and interventions

Factor	Construct	Items included	Variance extracted	Cronbach's alpha
1	Support (SUPP)	8.4; 8.5; 8.6; 8.9; 8.10; 8.11; 8.12; 8.13; 8.14*; 9.1; 9.2; 9.18	31.3	0.917
2	Institutional work culture (INS)	8.7; 8.16; 8.19; 9.20; 10.3; 10.4; 10.5; 10.6; 10.7; 10.16; 10.17; 10.18	7.3	0.892
3	Job-related stressors (JOB)	9.8; 10.10; 10.11; 10.19; 10.20	4.7	0.761
4	Employee engagement (EE)	8.1; 8.3; 8.17; 10.2; 11.3	3.9	0.769

* indicates a reverse-coded item

The above table identifies the themes emerging from the factor analysis for employee engagement. The reliability of each of the four factors was tested by calculating the Cronbach's alpha (α) value. A Cronbach alpha (α) value of at least 0.7 and above was obtained, which is acceptable for a measuring instrument, as shown in Table 4.8 above (SUPP=0.917; INS=0.892; JOB=0.761; EE=0.769). Furthermore, 47.19% of the variance in the data is explained by the four factors as illustrated in Table 4.8 above (SUPP=31.3; INS=7.3; JOB=4.7; EE=3.9) and the rotation converged in four iterations as summarised in the table above. The values achieved for Cronbach's alpha (α) indicate good internal consistency amongst the

items on each factor, and the composite variables formed by calculating the average of the agreement scores for all items included in a variable are reliable. The factor loading structure (Table 4.7 above) indicates that construct validity has been achieved through convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 4.9: Employee engagement

Employee engagement constructs	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
Support (SUPP)	198	3.26	0.820	4.442	197	<0.001
Institutional work culture (INS)	198	2.99	0.679	-.148	197	0.882
Job-related stressors (JOB)	198	3.31	0.836	5.217	197	<0.001
Employee engagement (EE)	198	3.97	0.679	20.068	197	<0.001

An analysis of the composite variables identified in Table 4.8 was conducted to determine if there is significant agreement/disagreement with each composite variable related to EE. The one-sample t-test was therefore applied to determine this. The above results (Table 4.9) indicate significant agreement that employees have the support of supervisors and colleagues ($\bar{x}=3.26$; $p<0.001$); there are job-related stressors present ($\bar{x}=3.31$; $p<0.001$); and employee engagement is positive ($\bar{x}=3.97$; $p<0.001$).

4.4.3.2 Factor analysis for workplace conflict

Table 4.10: Workplace conflict–factor loadings

Statements	Factor	
	1	2
9.10 I often regard cultural differences at the DUT as a cause for conflict	.691	
9.15 I believe that line managers at DUT often abuse their power resulting in conflict situations arising	.656	
9.9 In my opinion racial differences play an important role in conflict at the DUT	.629	
9.12 In my opinion, line managers resort to disciplinary action too quickly without first communicating with an employee	.546	
9.3 Workplace conflict takes up a lot of time at DUT	.492	
9.19 In my opinion, the leadership of the institution tends to abuse their power when dealing with staff	.448	
9.5 I am often fearful of conflict situations since I am afraid to be victimised later by management	.447	
9.16 DUT management does not make a concerted effort to resolve conflict timeously and often allows it to escalate	.404	
9.6 The workplace conflict management structures at the DUT can resolve problems within a reasonable timeframe		.656
9.11 The grievance process as a conflict management tool at the DUT is effective		.637
9.13 I believe the DUT provides line managers with sufficient training in how to handle conflict situations		.586
9.4 The processes to manage conflict are well known to all at DUT		.461
9.14 In my opinion, the unions at the DUT provide adequate support if there is a conflict situation		.454

Factor analysis with Promax rotation was applied to the 13 items related to workplace conflict. Two factors were extracted, which account for 32.99% of the variance in the data. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO)

of 0.717 and a significant Bartlett's test indicates that the data was adequate for successful and reliable extraction. Rotation converged in three iterations. The extracted factors and the item loadings are summarised in Table 4.10 above. Two themes (Workplace Conflict and Conflict Management) were also identified from Table 4.10. Eight items were extracted for the workplace conflict theme (9.3; 9.5; 9.9; 9.10; 9.12; 9.15; 9.16; 9.19) and five items for the conflict management theme (9.4; 9.6; 9.11; 9.13; 9.14). The reliability and validity of the two themes (CON and CON_MAN) are outlined in the table below. Details of the extracted factors are shown Table 4.11 below.

Table 4.11: Summary of exploratory factor analysis for workplace conflict and conflict management

Factor	Construct	Items included	Variance extracted	Cronbach's alpha
1	Conflict in the workplace (CON)	9.1; 9.5; 9.9; 9.10; 9.12; 9.15; 9.16; 9.19	21.9	0.773
2	Conflict management (CON_MAN)	9.4; 9.6; 9.11; 9.13; 9.14	11.1	0.697

* Indicates a reverse-coded item

The above table identifies the themes emerging from the factor analysis for Workplace Conflict. The reliability of each of the two factors was tested by calculating Cronbach's alpha (α) value. A Cronbach alpha (α) value of at least 0.7 and above was obtained, which is acceptable for a measuring instrument, as shown in Table 4.11 above (CON=0.773; CON_MAN=0.697). Furthermore, 32.99% of the variance in the data is explained by the two factors as illustrated in Table 4.11 (CON=21.9; CON_MAN=11.1) and the rotation converged in two iterations as summarised in the table above. The values achieved for Cronbach's alpha (α) indicate that there is adequate internal consistency amongst the items on each factor, and the composite

variables formed by calculating the average of the agreement scores for all items included in a variable are reliable. Details of the extracted factors are shown Table 4.12 below.

Table 4.12: Workplace conflict

Conflict constructs	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
Conflict in the workplace (CON)	198	3.15	0.602	3.423	197	0.001
Conflict management (CON_MAN)	198	2.63	0.686	-7.671	197	<0.001

An analysis on the above composite variables was done to determine if there is significant agreement/disagreement to each composite variable related to Workplace Conflict. The one-sample t-test was subsequently applied to determine this. The above results indicate significant agreement that there is conflict in the workplace ($\bar{x}=3.15$; $p=0.001$), while there is significant disagreement that conflict management is acceptable ($\bar{x}=2.63$; $p<0.001$).

4.4.4 Exploring the strategies and interventions used at the DUT for employee engagement

4.4.4.1 One Sample T-Test

The One Sample t-test is a parametric statistical test that examines whether a population's mean differs significantly from a known or hypothesised value (Nicol and Pexman, 2010:145). The one-sample t-test is employed when we do not have complete population data at our disposal but nevertheless wish to determine whether our sample is representative of a given population. In this test, the average

agreement score is tested against the central score of '3' to determine if it differs significantly from '3'. If there is a significant difference ($p < .05$), this is to be interpreted as significant agreement if the mean score is >3 and significant disagreement if the mean score is <3 . If it is not significant ($p \geq 0.05$), it means that there is neither significant agreement nor significant disagreement and nothing more can be said about the result. The one sample t-test was employed in the study to determine whether there is statistically significant agreement or disagreement between variables.

4.4.4.2 Strategies/interventions pertaining to the organisation/ organisational culture

Table 4.13: Organisational culture

Organisation/Organisational culture	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
At work my opinions seem to count	198	3.43	1.172	5.155	197	<0.001
I believe that the leadership of the DUT values employees' involvement in the objectives of the institution	198	3.04	1.105	.450	197	0.653
Leadership at the DUT makes a concerted effort to improve the working conditions of staff	198	2.70	1.143	-3.668	197	<0.001
The DUT places enough emphasis on employee well-being (e.g. managing workplace stress and challenges)	198	2.84	1.119	-2.032	197	0.044
I believe that the DUT undertakes pro-active planning and involves staff in this process	198	2.79	1.059	-2.818	197	0.005
I believe that leadership development is a priority at the DUT	198	3.19	1.109	2.372	197	0.019
The current communication processes at the DUT are suited to the rapid changes that the institution is facing	198	2.91	1.048	-1.221	197	0.224
I believe that joint decision-making at the institution does not receive the attention it deserves	198	3.48	.916	7.368	197	<0.001
The culture of the DUT promotes shared responsibility	198	2.90	1.030	-1.310	197	0.192
DUT regards professional development as an individual responsibility and not that of the institution	198	3.36	1.071	4.779	197	<0.001
In my opinion the salary structure of the DUT is equitable in comparison to other higher education institutions	198	2.70	1.108	-3.849	197	<0.001
I feel motivated by the career opportunities provided at the DUT	198	2.80	1.125	-2.464	197	0.015
Performance is measured fairly at the DUT	198	2.37	1.053	-8.371	197	<0.001
Innovation is emphasised at the DUT	198	3.46	1.083	6.035	197	<0.001
The current infrastructure at the DUT is hampering my performance	198	3.28	1.144	3.417	197	0.001

The above results indicate significant agreement for six (6) items: 8.7; 10.4; 10.6; 10.9; 10.18; 10.20 and significant disagreement for six (6) items: 8.19; 9.20; 10.3; 10.15; 10.16; 10.17. There is significant agreement that: employees' opinions seem to count ($\bar{x}$ =3.43; p <0.001); leadership development is a priority ($\bar{x}$ =3.19; p <0.05); joint decision-making at the institution does not receive the attention it deserves ($\bar{x}$ =3.48; p <0.001); DUT regards professional development as an individual

responsibility and not that of the institution ($\bar{x}=3.36$; $p<0.001$); innovation is emphasised at the DUT ($\bar{x}=3.46$; $p<0.001$); and the current infrastructure at the DUT is hampering employees' performance ($\bar{x}=3.28$; $p=0.001$). The statement with the highest mean value is **Statement 10.6** ($\bar{x}=3.48$) with a p-value of $p<0.05$: employees believe that joint decision-making does not receive the attention it deserves.

According to Harter, Schmidt and Killham (2003:7), asking for an employee's input and taking that input into account while making decisions can often result in better decisions. This is because employees are often more familiar with persons and variables that affect the whole system than managers are. Furthermore, when employees believe they are involved in decision-making, they are more likely to accept responsibility for the outcomes. Chen (2007 cited in Choudhury and Mohanty, 2018) identified participation in decision-making as a key driver of EE. This also confirms an organisation's support and consideration for employee input, thus leading to better decision-making. Additionally, opportunities for career development, including leadership development, can affect EE and promote a sense of fulfilment and purpose (Harter, Schmidt and Killham, 2003:8). There is significant disagreement that: leadership at the DUT makes a concerted effort to improve the working conditions of staff ($\bar{x}=2.70$; $p<0.001$); DUT places enough emphasis on employee well-being ($\bar{x}=2.84$; $p<0.05$); DUT undertakes pro-active planning and involves staff in this process ($\bar{x}=2.79$; $p<0.05$); the salary structure of the DUT is equitable in comparison to other higher education institutions ($\bar{x}=2.70$; $p<0.001$); employees feel motivated by the career opportunities provided at the DUT ($\bar{x}=2.80$; $p<0.05$); and performance is measured fairly at the DUT ($\bar{x}=2.37$; $p<0.001$). The statement with the lowest mean value is **Statement 10.17** ($\bar{x}=2.37$) with a p-value of $p<0.05$: employees do not believe that performance is measured fairly at the DUT.

4.4.4.3 Strategies/interventions pertaining to employee support

Table 4.14: Employee support

Employee Support	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
In the last 7 days I have received recognition and praise for doing good work.	198	2.61	1.285	-4.260	197	<0.001
My supervisor/HOD at work seems to care about me as a person.	198	3.49	1.343	5.185	197	<0.001
There is someone at work who encourages my development	198	3.43	1.235	4.891	197	<0.001
My fellow employees are committed to doing quality work	198	3.40	1.135	5.010	197	<0.001
I have a best friend at work	198	2.90	1.274	-1.115	197	0.266
In the last 6 months someone at work has talked to me about my progress	198	3.05	1.261	.563	197	0.574
In the past 12 months I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow	198	3.49	1.148	6.068	197	<.001
I trust my colleagues at DUT	198	3.02	1.234	.230	197	0.818
I am constantly undermined by my fellow employees at DUT	198	2.36	1.130	-7.987	197	<0.001
If I have challenges in my current job, my line manager is supportive in assisting me	198	3.52	1.225	5.977	197	<0.001
In my current position, I have the autonomy to solve problems	198	3.71	.963	10.408	197	<.0001
My line manager provides me with regular feedback on my performance	198	2.83	1.238	-1.951	197	0.052

The above results indicate significant agreement with six (6) items: 8.5; 8.6; 8.9; 8.12; 9.1; 9.2 and significant disagreement with two (2) items: 8.4; 8.14. There is significant agreement that: supervisors seem to care about employees as people ($\bar{x}$ =3.49; p <0.001); there is someone at work who encourages employee development ($\bar{x}$ =3.43; p <0.001); fellow employees are committed to producing

quality work ($\bar{x}=3.40$; $p<0.001$); there are sufficient opportunities to learn and grow at the DUT ($\bar{x}=3.49$; $p<0.001$); the line-manager supports employees when faced with challenges in their jobs ($\bar{x}=3.52$; $p<0.001$); and employees have the autonomy to solve problems in their jobs ($\bar{x}=3.71$; $p<0.001$). The statement with the highest mean value is **Statement 9.2** ($\bar{x}=3.71$) with a p-value of $p<0.05$: employees agree that they have the autonomy to solve problems in their jobs.

This is confirmed in the study by May, Gilson and Harter (2004:16), that the relationship with one's immediate superior can have a significant impact on an individual's perceptions of the safety of the work environment. Positive reinforcement, empathy for the needs and feelings of their staff, encouragement to voice concerns, learn new skills, and resolve job-related issues are all characteristics of supervisors that foster a friendly work environment. Worker self-determination and interest are increased by such encouraging acts. Workers with self-determined mindsets feel empowered to take the initiative and control their own behaviour. When they are in such encouraging surroundings, these employees are probably going to feel more comfortable engaging completely, trying new things, talking about their mistakes, and learning from their actions (Deci and Ryan, 1987 cited in May, Gilson and Harter, 2004:16). Saks (2006 cited in Choudhury and Mohanty, 2018) also identified job characteristics such as autonomy and job control as key drivers of EE. This was also confirmed by other researchers such as Stairs, Galpin, Page and Linley (2006); Seijts and Crim (2007); Chen (2007); Slatten and Mehmetoglu (2011 cited in Choudhury and Mohanty, 2018); and Bailey, Madden, Alfes and Fletcher (2017).

There is significant disagreement that: employees receive regular recognition and praise for producing good work ($\bar{x}=2.61$; $p<0.001$); and employees are constantly undermined by colleagues at the DUT ($\bar{x}=2.36$; $p<0.001$). The statement with the lowest mean value is Statement 8.14 ($\bar{x}=2.36$) with a p-value of $p<0.05$: employees do not feel constantly undermined by their colleagues at the DUT.

4.4.4.4 Strategies/interventions pertaining to employee job/work-related stressors

Table 4.15: Job/work-related stressors

Job-related stressors	n	Mean	Standard deviation	t	df	p-value
My current job is cognitively demanding since it requires constant concentration	198	4.05	.960	15.400	197	<0.001
I often experience frustration in my present job due to the inability of my colleagues	198	2.88	1.214	-1.346	197	0.180
I get frustrated daily as a result of a lack of infrastructure at the DUT to support me in my present job	198	3.22	1.299	2.408	197	=0.017
Often, I feel as if my voice is not heard at the DUT	198	3.30	1.126	3.787	197	<0.001
Although staff at the DUT are encouraged to participate in decision-making, there is a general climate of distancing oneself from these processes	198	3.37	.983	5.350	197	<0.001
My workload has doubled in the last five years	198	3.62	1.155	7.571	197	<0.001
I often struggle with work-related stress	198	3.21	1.115	2.676	197	0.008
In my experience I have received sufficient coaching at the DUT to fully understand what is expected of me in my present job	198	3.01	1.122	.127	197	0.899
I often feel stressed because of the performance targets that I am expected to achieve	198	3.22	1.126	2.715	197	0.007
I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.	198	3.64	1.052	8.516	197	<0.001

The above results indicate that there is significant agreement with eight (8) items: 8.15; 9.8; 10.1; 10.8; 10.10; 10.11; 10.19; 8.2. There is significant agreement that: jobs are cognitively demanding, requiring constant concentration ($\bar{x}=4.05$; $p<0.001$); employees are frustrated due to inadequate infrastructure to support them in their jobs ($\bar{x}=3.22$; $p<0.05$); employees feel their voices are not heard at the DUT ($\bar{x}=3.30$; $p<0.001$); employees distance themselves from participation in decision-making despite encouragement to do so ($\bar{x}=3.37$; $p<0.001$); employee workloads have doubled in the last five years ($\bar{x}=3.62$; $p<0.001$); employees often struggle with work-related stress ($\bar{x}=3.21$; $p<0.001$); employees frequently feel stressed due to expected performance targets ($\bar{x}=3.22$; $p<0.05$); and employees have the necessary materials and equipment to perform their jobs ($\bar{x}=3.64$; $p<0.001$). The statement with highest mean value is **Statement 8.15** ($\bar{x}=4.05$) with a p-value of $p<0.05$: employees agree that their jobs are cognitively demanding and require constant concentration.

According to Harter, Schmidt and Killham (2003), employees will feel stressed in trying to meet performance targets if managers do not define and clarify the desired outcomes to be achieved. This is regarded as the most basic of employee needs and manager responsibilities. Additionally, the failure to set aside structured time to talk to an employee about their progress, achievements, goals, etcetera may lead to poor decision-making by both parties (Choudhury and Mohanty, 2018:33). Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) also argued that manageable workloads, feelings of control and being given choices increases the possibility of engagement. Kahn (1990) stated that psychological meaningfulness can be attained through challenging work, work variety, the ability to use different skills, autonomy, and the chance to make significant contributions (cited in Saks, 2006:604). Markos and Sridevi (2010:93) also stated that employers should ensure that employees have everything they need to do their jobs and that managers are expected to provide employees with all the resources such as physical or material, financial and information resources to perform their work effectively.

4.4.4.5 Summary Analysis

From the analysis above, the following strategies/interventions are applied at the DUT. The DUT seems to consider the opinions of its employees, and leaders seem to care about employees as people. There is also perceived supervisor support for employees in their jobs, employee development is encouraged, and opportunities for growth and learning are created. In addition, leadership development is prioritised at the institution. Saks and Gruman (2014 cited in Kossyva, Theriou, Aggelidis and Sargiannidid, 2023) also confirmed that leadership is a critical antecedent of employee engagement. A further strategy that appears evident is that work autonomy and problem-solving are encouraged and promoted, and job design is also critical in creating cognitively stimulating and demanding work. The results also indicate that innovation and creativity are promoted at the institution, while sufficient resources are provided to staff to perform their work. Meaningful work (Albrecht, Green, and Marty, 2021), autonomy, coaching, opportunities for development and supportive co-workers (Saks and Gruman, 2014) have been found to positively influence employee engagement.

However, the analysis also revealed that: leadership at the DUT does not make a concerted effort to improve the working conditions of its employees; there is insufficient attention given to employee well-being; there is a lack of pro-active planning and employee involvement in such processes; there is a perception that the salary structure at the DUT is not equitable in comparison to other higher education institutions; performance evaluation/measurement is not seen as fair; and employees do not necessarily receive constant recognition and praise for good work. Saks and Gruman (2014 cited in Kossyva, Theriou, Aggelidis and Sarigiannidis, 2023) identified performance feedback, rewards and recognition, employee support, opportunities for development, and a positive workplace climate as being positively related to employee engagement.

Additionally, there is a perception that: joint decision-making at the institution does not receive adequate attention, professional development is not promoted and co-ordinated at an institutional level, employees are frustrated with the lack of infrastructure to support them in their jobs, the existing infrastructure at the DUT negatively affects job performance, employees tend to distance themselves from participating in joint decision-making, workloads have significantly increased in the last five years, and employees regularly feel stressed due to expected performance targets from the institution. It is also interesting to note that employees do not feel constantly undermined by their colleagues at the DUT. According to Shuck and Reio (2014), organisations may suffer from low engagement due to the subsequent decline in worker productivity and well-being. A further study by Farndale and Murrer (2014) also found that employee engagement is positively impacted by certain job resources, such as financial rewards, a supportive team environment, and decision-making_opportunities.

4.4.5 Hypothesis Testing - Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is a statistical tool for the exploration of relationships amongst variables. Typically, the researcher aims to determine the causal effect of one variable on another. To investigate such concerns, the researcher compiles data on the underlying factors of interest and uses regression to determine the quantitative effect of the causative variables on the variable that they influence. The researcher evaluates the "statistical significance" of estimated relationships, meaning the degree of confidence that the genuine relationship is similar to the calculated relationship (Schroeder, Sjoquist and Stephan, 2016:1). Linear Regression estimates the coefficients of a linear equation using one or more independent variables that best predict the value of the dependent variable.

4.4.5.1 To determine the antecedents of employee engagement

To achieve this objective/RQ, regression analysis will be applied with EE as the DV (dependent variable) and the EE strategies/interventions as IVs (independent variables).

Table 4.16: Antecedents of employee engagement

IV	R ²	F	df1; df2	p- value	β (regression coefficient)	t	p-value
SUPP	0.327	31.448	3; 194	<0.001	0.270	4.396	<0.001
INS					0.254	3.332	0.001
JOB					-0.114	-2.272	0.024

DV – EE (employee engagement)

Table 4.16 above illustrates the linear regression model on the three composite variables relating to employee engagement strategies and interventions (SUPP; INS & JOB) and their relationship with EE (predicting). As illustrated in Table 4.16 above, $R^2 = 0.327$, $F(3, 194) = 31.448$, $p < 0.001$. Thus, the three composite variables relating to EE strategies and interventions predict 32.7% of the variance in EE at DUT. In addition, Table 4.16 indicates that EE support (SUPP: $\beta = 0.270$, $p < 0.001$) and a positive institutional work approach (INS: $\beta = 0.254$, $p = 0.001$) both have a positive and statistically significant relationship with EE.

The seminal study by Saks (2006) supports this finding that perceived organisational support (POS) and perceived supervisor support (PSS) for employees are strong predictors of EE, while the lack of supervisor support was found to be an essential element associated with burnout. The study by Markos and Sridevi (2010) identified a distinctive and supportive corporate culture that aligns the goals and values of managers across the organisation as critical to ensuring elevated levels of

engagement amongst employees. Alternatively, the presence of job-related stressors (JOB: $\beta = -0.114$ $p=0.024$) has a negative effect on employee engagement (EE). This confirms the view of existing literature that occupational stress has a negative impact on employee engagement (Velnampy and Aravinthan, 2013 cited in Simon and Amarakoon, 2015). However, Simon and Amarakoon (2015) argue that the extent or levels of occupational stress experienced by employees determines its impact on EE and that the relationship between occupational stress and EE should not necessarily be seen as a negative linear relationship.

4.4.5.2 To determine the effect of employee engagement on workplace conflict

To achieve this objective/RQ, regression analysis will be applied with EE as the IV (Independent variable) and workplace conflict (CON) as the DV (dependent variable).

Table 4.17: Effect of employee engagement on workplace conflict

IV	R ²	F	df1; df2	p-value	β (regression coefficient)	t	p-value
EE	0.011	2.229	1; 196	0.137	-0.094	-1.493	0.137

DV – CON (workplace conflict)

Table 4.17 shows the linear regression model predicting the relationship between Employee Engagement (IV - EE) and Workplace Conflict (DV – CON). Based on the results in table 4.17 above, EE only accounts for 1.1% ($R^2 = 0.011$) of the variance in Workplace Conflict (DV -CON), $F(1, 196) = 2.229$, $p=0.137$. EE ($\beta = -0.094$, $p=0.137$). The above table also indicates that Employee Engagement (EE) does not have a statistically significant effect on workplace conflict ($\beta = -0.094$, $p=0.137$). However, according to Holtzhausen (2020), there was a negative correlation

between all EE sub-scales and different types of conflict, including task, relationship, process and status conflict. This also supported the findings of Jungst and Blumberg (2016, cited in Holtzhausen, 2020), who found that prolonged unpleasantness in the form of task and other types of conflict lowers employee engagement in the job.

4.4.5.3 To determine if any of the employee engagement strategies/ interventions affect workplace conflict

To achieve this objective/RQ, regression analysis will be applied with workplace conflict (CON) as the DV (dependent variable) and the EE strategies/ interventions as IVs (independent variables).

Table 4.18: Effect of employee engagement strategies/interventions on workplace conflict

IV	R ²	F	df1; df2	p- value	β (regression coefficient)	t	p-value
SUPP	0.173	13.520	3; 194	<0.001	-0.010	-.0173	0.863
INS					-0.044	-0.592	0.555
JOB					0.284	5.782	<0.001

DV – CON (workplace conflict)

Table 4.18 above illustrates the relationship between EE strategies and interventions (IV) and Workplace conflict (DV). Based on the results shown in Table 4.18, the three composite variables relating to employee engagement strategies and interventions (independent variables – IVs) account for 17.3% (R²= .173) of the variance in Workplace Conflict (DV – CON), F (3; 194) = 13.520, p<0.001. From the table above, both employee support (β=-0.010; p=0.863) and a positive institutional work approach (β=-0.044; p=0.555) do not have a significant effect on workplace conflict. In contrast to the above results, Holtzhausen (2020:251) states that organisational

culture has the capacity to influence how conflict manifests and is managed within an enterprise. In addition, a study by Caesens, Stinglhamber, Demoulin, De Wilde and Mierop (2019) found that perceived organisational support (POS) is negatively associated with workplace conflict, more specifically task and relationship conflict.

Moreover, Table 4.18 above shows that job stressors (JOB) have a positive and statistically significant effect on workplace conflict (CON) ($B=0.284$; $p<0.001$). A study by Beru and Kilelo (2015) found that occupational stress and organisational conflict are two sides of the same coin. In other words, conflict can lead to occupational stress, while occupational stress can also lead to conflict.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an analysis of the data received from the questionnaire responses. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were presented where applicable. Additionally, frequencies and percentages were employed to present the results. Descriptive statistics were presented using graphs, tables and pie charts. The study also conducted a factor analysis on the collected data to identify and form composite variables relating to EE. Furthermore, inferential statistics were conducted to test the hypotheses of the study, and the findings were discussed referring to appropriate literature. Parametric tests (one sample t-test and regression analysis) were used to evaluate data on SPSS version 29 for Windows. The next chapter will provide a brief discussion on the empirical results, as well as the conclusions and recommendations of this research study, together with directions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter are based on the findings and statistical analysis of the empirical results from the previous chapter. This research study aimed to investigate the influence of Employee Engagement on managing Workplace Conflict at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The objectives of the study were to explore the EE strategies and interventions used at the DUT, in order to determine the antecedents of EE, as well as the effect of EE on workplace conflict at the DUT. The target population was given a pre-coded, closed-ended questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: Section A contained biographical information and Section B information related to employee engagement and workplace conflict. The study entailed an extensive review of the literature, including a review of the theoretical models on EE and WC. A quantitative research design was adopted using the questionnaire method for data collection.

One hundred and ninety-eight (198) responses were returned from a sample size of 320, resulting in a response rate of 62%. A statistician was consulted to assist in performing the statistical analysis, including the formulated hypotheses. The statistical analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 for Windows. The descriptive statistics for the study variables were analysed, and hypotheses were tested. This chapter therefore provides a more thorough description and discussion of the research questions. The findings also yielded some recommendations, which will be discussed in this chapter. Furthermore, the chapter shall demonstrate a causal link between previous chapters and the research objectives and questions that constitute this study, as well as a thorough assessment of how the research objectives were met. Using the services

of a senior librarian, the thesis was submitted through Turnitin yielding a plagiarism report of 11%.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The main aim of the study was to investigate the influence of EE on managing workplace conflict at the DUT. Some key conclusions were reached regarding the findings of the study. The findings revealed that employee support, organisational/institutional work culture and job stressors are key antecedents of EE. Additionally, it can also be concluded that EE antecedents may have either a positive or negative effect on EE. A further conclusion is that EE does not have a significant effect on workplace conflict. Finally, the findings showed that EE strategies pertaining to employee support and positive organisational culture do not have a significant effect on workplace conflict, while job stressors tend to have a positive and significant effect on workplace conflict. Therefore, based on the reflections of the findings in the study, it can be concluded that EE does not have a significant influence on the management of workplace conflict at the Durban University of Technology. The aim of the study was therefore achieved.

5.3 REFLECTIONS ON THE EMPIRICAL RESULTS/FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

5.3.1 Employee engagement strategies and interventions (objective 1)

The study identified three (3) Employee Engagement strategies and interventions being implemented at the DUT. These include strategies/interventions pertaining to the DUT's organisational culture, employee support, and job or work-related stressors. The findings revealed that the DUT values employee opinions; prioritises employee and leadership development; and encourages innovation and creativity at the institution. Additionally, the organisation provides opportunities for employee learning and growth. There is also perceived supervisor support for employees when

faced with work and job-related challenges, and employees are given the autonomy to solve job-related problems. The findings also indicate that the institution provides sufficient resources for staff to perform their work and jobs are designed to promote cognitively stimulating and demanding work. Markos and Sridevi (2010 cited in Sun and Bunchapattanasakda 2019) suggest that EE strategies are critical in keeping employees engaged in their jobs. The authors suggest that two-way communication, opportunities for development and advancement, sufficient resources to perform work, strong feedback systems, a distinctive organisational culture, financial and non-financial incentives and appropriate training should be part of any EE strategy, which will enhance EE.

5.3.2 Antecedents of employee engagement (objective 2)

The study identified three antecedents of EE at the DUT. These included employee support, institutional/organisational work culture, and job-related stressors. Of these, two antecedents (EE support and positive organisational/institutional work culture) had a positive and statistically significant relationship with EE, while one antecedent (job-related stressors) has a negative effect on EE. Bakker and Schaufeli (2008 cited in Choudhury and Mohanty 2019) identified support and recognition from colleagues and supervisors as a critical antecedent or driver of EE. Wollard and Shuck (2011 cited in Choudhury and Mohanty, 2019) also identified an authentic and supportive organisational culture as another critical driver of EE.

5.3.3 The relationship between employee engagement and workplace conflict (objective 3)

Further empirical findings showed that Employee Engagement does not have a statistically significant effect on workplace conflict. Contrary to these findings, Holtzhausen (2020) found that all EE sub-scales and various forms of conflict, such as task, interpersonal, process and status conflict, showed a negative correlation.

5.3.4 The relationship between employee engagement strategies and workplace conflict (objective 3)

This study revealed that strategies pertaining to employee support and a positive organisational/institutional work culture do not have a statistically significant effect on workplace conflict, while job-related stressors do have a positive and significant effect on workplace conflict. In contrast to the findings above, studies by Caesens *et al.* (2019) and Holtzhausen (2020) found that certain EE strategies such as organisational culture and perceived organisational support do have an effect on workplace conflict. Beru, Kilelo and Kipkemboi (2015) did however find a relationship between job stressors and workplace conflict.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the empirical study, the following recommendations are proposed to the management of the DUT in relation to employee engagement and workplace conflict.

5.4.1 Understanding employee engagement strategies and interventions

The research findings identified three EE strategies and interventions related to organisational culture, employee support, and job or work-related stressors. These were evident from the fact that, firstly, the DUT values employee opinions; prioritises employee and leadership development; and provides opportunities for learning and growth, as well as encourages innovation and creativity. Secondly, the findings revealed that there was also perceived supervisor support for employees in their jobs and autonomy to resolve job-related problems. Finally, the findings revealed that sufficient resources were provided for staff to perform their work, and staff have meaningful and stimulating work. It is therefore recommended that the leadership at the DUT continue to implement EE strategies and interventions designed to improve the levels of EE at the institution. A key objective of this research was to explore the

strategies and interventions used at the DUT. As identified above, these strategies were geared towards EE support, organisational culture and job-related stressors, which are likely to yield positive outcomes for the institution such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, organisational citizenship behaviour and reduced labour turnover. The application of effective employee engagement strategies that focus on employee support, a positive organisational culture and reduced job-related stress may assist institutional leaders in successfully engaging employees and ensuring the sustainability of the organisation.

5.4.2 Understanding the antecedents of employee engagement

The findings showed that there are three antecedents of employee engagement, namely employee support, institutional work culture, and job stressors. Employee support and a positive institutional work culture were found to have a positive impact on EE, while job stressors were found to negatively impact EE. Analysing and understanding the antecedents of employee engagement can assist in determining where and how engagement initiatives should be addressed. One of the primary objectives of this research was to determine the antecedents of employee engagement. As indicated, employee support, organisational work culture and job-related stressors are critical antecedents of EE. This can be achieved through increased supervisor and organisational support for employees; the development of a strong and positive organisational work culture supporting organisational goals; and reducing job-related stressors negatively impacting EE at the institution.

5.4.3 Improve the working conditions of employees at the Durban University of Technology

The findings indicated that a significant percentage of respondents felt that the leadership of the DUT does not make a concerted effort to improve working conditions at the institution. According to Gruman and Saks (2011), working conditions are seen as a critical antecedent of EE. It is therefore recommended that

the institution introduce programmes addressing employee well-being and occupational stress. This is based on the findings that the institution does not place sufficient emphasis on employee well-being and occupational stress, which was found to have a negative effect on EE. It is also recommended that perceived unfairness with regard to the salary structure at the DUT be addressed and a review undertaken to determine whether it is equitable in relation to other higher education institutions (traditional universities and UoTs) in South Africa. A further recommendation related to working conditions is to improve the infrastructure at the DUT to support employees in their work. The findings revealed that respondents were frustrated with inadequate infrastructure, despite proper infrastructure being needed to support them in their jobs. Moreover, the current infrastructure hampers employee performance. Finally, it is recommended that the institution addresses the increased workload of staff through more efficient HR planning, job design and recruitment processes. The findings indicated that more than 50% of respondents felt that their workloads had doubled in the past 5 years.

5.4.4 Increase opportunities for development and growth

While a significant majority of respondents indicated that there was someone at work who encouraged their development, and that there were sufficient opportunities to develop and grow, they did not believe that the institution showed enough concern for their professional development. It is therefore recommended that the institution continues to provide opportunities for employees to learn and grow. Additionally, it is recommended that professional development amongst DUT staff is co-ordinated and promoted from above. This is based on the findings that respondents felt that their professional development was not of interest or concern to the institution and there was little to no involvement from the institution. It is also recommended that the institution provide more opportunities for career advancement as respondents did not feel motivated by the career opportunities provided at the DUT. Finally, it is recommended that a mentorship programme be introduced in the organisation to promote a culture of learning, strengthen the organisational culture and improve the

quality of leadership, as a significant percentage of respondents felt that mentorship programmes would benefit them in their jobs, whilst a reasonable number of respondents indicated that they had not received sufficient coaching in their current jobs.

5.4.5 Increase pro-active planning and employee involvement in the decision-making process

It is recommended that the institution promotes and encourages joint decision-making at the institution and ensures that employees do not feel threatened or intimidated by the process. The findings indicated that employees were reluctant to participate in decision-making and that joint decision-making at the institution was not given the appropriate attention it deserved. Respondents also indicated that their voices were not always heard at the institution and that they often distanced themselves from participating in decision-making despite encouragement to do so. It is recommended that managers request and consider input from employees to ensure better decision-making and therefore achieve buy-in from employees for the outcomes of the decision-making process.

5.4.6 Improve the performance management system at the institution and ensure fairness throughout

Respondents indicated that they did not feel that performance at the institution was measured fairly. It is therefore recommended that the DUT develop a performance management system that ensures the fair measurement of performance. It is also recommended that the DUT introduce incentives through recognition and praise for employees who perform at their best and in line with organisational goals. This is based on the findings that respondents did not feel that they receive regular recognition and praise for producing good work. This does not have to be financial, as Markos and Sridevi (2010) found that most drivers/antecedents leading to EE are non-financial in nature. Finally, DUT needs to improve the current infrastructure at

the institution, which respondents felt was also hindering their performance on the job.

5.4.7 Address work-related stress and its potentially negative impact on conflict and conflict resolution in the workplace

The findings indicate that respondents struggled with work-related stress, believed their workload has doubled in the last 5 years and felt the DUT does not necessarily place enough emphasis on employee well-being. Respondents also indicated that they often feel stressed due to expected performance targets. It was also found that there is a significant relationship between job stressors and workplace conflict. The institution should therefore implement organisational and individual stress management strategies, such as employee assistance programs (EAP), job procedure modification, realistic job previews to understand a typical workload and schedule, and matching workloads with employee capabilities and resources. It is also recommended that the institution continue to design jobs that provide meaning, stimulation, and opportunities for employees to apply their skills, as well as clearly defining roles and responsibilities in the job. Finally, the institution should educate employees about stress, allowing them to participate in decision-making that affects their jobs, and introducing a more participative leadership style to involve subordinates in resolving stress-related challenges.

5.4.8 Opportunities for employees to feel valued and involved through effective communication systems

While respondents felt that their opinions do seem to count, and supervisors do seem to care about employees as people, they also felt that their voices were not always heard at the institution. It is therefore recommended that the institution continues to provide sufficient opportunities for employees to feed their views and opinions upwards and ensure they are kept informed about what goes on in the institution. Managers need to listen to employees and respond to their needs, as well

as finding the connection between individual needs and those of the organisation. Additionally, there needs to be greater concern for employee well-being at the institution as indicated previously.

5.4.9 Autonomy to solve job-related problems

While the findings indicated that a significant majority of the respondents felt they have the autonomy to resolve work-related problems, a small percentage felt that they were not offered the opportunity. It is therefore recommended that senior management at the DUT provide all employees with the freedom to make work-related decisions where appropriate, and for employees to assume responsibility and accountability for these decisions.

5.4.10 Support and recognition for good work

The findings revealed that a significant percentage of respondents did not feel they received recognition and praise for good work. According to the Development Dimensions International (DDI, 2005 cited in Markos and Sridevi, 2010), where appropriate, supervisor support and recognition are critical for EE. It is therefore recommended that DUT managers provide sufficient recognition and praise for good work and adapt recognition according to the needs of each employee. Recognition should also be real and objective and based on employee performance.

5.4.11 Challenging and demanding work

The research findings showed that a significant percentage of respondents (80%) felt that their jobs were cognitively demanding and meaningful. According to Towers Perrin (2003), challenging work promotes EE. It is therefore recommended that the institution tap into the innate potential of its staff and their need for challenging work through effective job design and performance appraisals. A significant majority of respondents also indicated that innovation was encouraged at the DUT. It is

therefore recommended that opportunities for employees to be innovative and creative be provided for employees to ensure that work is both challenging and demanding, and that this be linked to the performance management and reward systems of the institution.

5.4.12 Leadership development

The findings indicated that not all respondents felt that leadership development was a priority at the DUT. According to Bailey *et al.* (2017), the quality of an organisation's leadership, including communication, recognition and support, can have a significant impact on EE. It is therefore recommended that the DUT invest more resources in appropriate leadership development at the institution to promote employee engagement, increased employee retention and reduced staff turnover.

5.4.13 Materials and equipment to perform work

From the research findings, it was established that a significant majority of respondents felt they had the necessary materials and equipment to perform their jobs. However, some respondents did not feel that they were provided with the required materials and equipment to perform their jobs. It is therefore recommended that the institution focus on providing all employees with the resources required to do their work as this will maximise efficiency and demonstrate to employees that their work is valued.

5.4.14 Perceived supervisor support

The findings showed that respondents felt that line managers do support them in their jobs, and there was a general feeling that supervisors seem to care about employees as people, thus reflecting an overall positive relationship between employees and supervisors. It is therefore recommended that DUT managers and

supervisors keep providing support to employees as it helps to create a comfortable and healthy work atmosphere that fosters positive employee attitudes.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to time constraints, the researcher only focused his study within the context of the Durban University of Technology (DUT), based in KwaZulu-Natal. The findings of the study are limited by the sample size of one institution of higher education and therefore requires some caution as it is not possible to generalise the research findings to other institutions of higher education as well as other contexts due to variations in situational factors. However, the use of one institution did allow the researcher to access staff more easily due to the proximity of the sample population. In addition, existing literature focusing specifically on employee engagement and workplace conflict was limited. The researcher therefore utilised accredited authors who were regarded as knowledgeable in this field.

Furthermore, due to the study using a quantitative research design with a structured pre-coded closed-ended questionnaire, the data is therefore in ordinal and nominal format. It did not include a qualitative study or mixed methods approach, thus limiting the data collected. Due to the ordinal nature of the study's data, the parametric tests used are less robust. However, it should be noted that using a quantitative approach was suited to the nature of the study to categorise, analyse and report on the large amounts of data collected. This also enabled the researcher to confidently generalise the results of the analysed survey to a larger target population. It must also be noted that the researcher faced numerous challenges with online data collection as employees were slow to respond (62%) to the questions online and had to be sent repeated reminders for the researcher to achieve a suitable response rate for the study.

5.6 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study provides significant insights into employee engagement and workplace conflict, several avenues for future research remain. One key limitation of this research is that it was based at only one institution in KZN, namely the DUT. However, similar studies could be expanded to other UoTs and traditional universities in South Africa, as well as comparative studies in the BRICS+ countries. Additionally, employing additional methodologies, such as a qualitative or mixed methods approach, might offer a more comprehensive understanding of EE and WC. Investigating these directions could not only validate the findings of this study but also expand the current knowledge base in Human Resource Management and more specifically, EE and WC. Further research in these areas could lead to practical applications, such as the potential impact of EE on WC, or the development of a framework for the enhancement of EE at the DUT or other UoTs and traditional universities, thus contributing to new knowledge in the field of EE and organisational conflict.

Although the study was only able to identify three antecedents and three strategies of EE at the DUT, further research may yield other antecedents and strategies prevalent at the institution. Additionally, further research regarding the impact of specific EE strategies on WC, as well as the effect of EE and Conflict Management on WC could be undertaken. Alternatively, while the findings did not establish a significant relationship between EE and WC, a review of the literature did highlight studies investigating the impact of workplace conflict on EE, as opposed to the focus of this study which investigated the impact of EE on WC.

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ANNEXURE A: COVER LETTER TO RESPONDENTS (LETTER OF CONSENT)



Annexure A

**Faculty of Management Sciences
Department of Human Resource Management**

Cell: +2782 558 9903

Durban University of
Technology
P.O. Box 1334
Durban
4000

Email: [taylorbd@gmail.com](mailto:taylerbd@gmail.com)
19402046@dut4life.ac.za

Date: 30 October 2021

Dear Participant

ASSISTANCE: QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETION

I am a registered student at the Durban University of Technology in the Department of Human Resources Management. I am currently pursuing the Master's in Management Sciences specialising in Human Resource Management in the Faculty of Management Sciences. **My topic is titled: The influence of employee engagement on managing workplace conflict at the Durban University of Technology.** You have been identified as one of the respondents comprising the sampling frame. I humbly request your assistance in completing the attached structured questionnaire.

The questionnaire will take about 15-20 minutes to complete and only requires you to tick the relevant pre-coded response in an objective manner. Please note that there is no right or wrong answer and kindly be honest and objective when answering the questions. From an ethical perspective, please be assured that all the information you provide will be strictly confidential, all responses will remain anonymous, and the responses will only be used for statistical analysis. In addition, your participation is merely voluntary and there is no coercion or undue influence in completing this questionnaire. Moreover, you may refuse to participate or discontinue your participation at any time. A summary of the main findings will be made available to the DUT.

I shall personally collect the questionnaires once completed. If you have any queries kindly contact me on the details provided above. Thank you for your willingness to complete the questionnaire.

Kind Regards

Mr Brent Tayler
Student Number: 19402046
Cell: 082 558 9903

ANNEXURE B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Annexure B

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Note: For this study, Institution refers to the DUT and all its academic/non-academic staff members, unless otherwise stated.

INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONDENTS:

- 1. Please select ONLY ONE response with a tick ✓ for each question.**
- 2. Answer ALL the pre-coded questions in this section.**
- 3. Please DO NOT leave any question blank.**

1. Do you consent to participate in this study

1.1	Yes	1
1.2	No	2

Please provide information about yourself by ticking (✓) the appropriate response(s).

2. Please indicate whether you are a permanent or contract staff member at DUT:

2.1	Permanent	1
2.2	Contract	2

3. Please indicate your gender:

3.1	Male	1
3.2	Female	2

4. Please indicate your age group:

4.1	20-25 years	1
4.2	26-30 years	2
4.3	31-35 years	3
4.4	36-40 years	4
4.5	41-50 years	5
4.6	> 51 years	6

5. For how long have you been employed at this institution?

5.1	1-5 years	1
5.2	6-10 years	2
5.3	11-15 years	3
5.4	16-20 years	4
5.5	21-25 years	5
5.6	>26 years	6

6. Please indicate your highest level of qualification:

6.1	Matric	1
6.2	Diploma/Bachelor's degree	2
6.3	Honours degree / BTech	3
6.4	Masters	4
6.5	Doctorate	5

7. Please indicate your category of employment:

7.1	Academic	1
7.2	Administration/support services	2

SECTION B: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND WORKPLACE CONFLICT

The two definitions below are provided to assist the reader in understanding concepts provided in the section that follows:

Employee Engagement is defined as “the harnessing of organisational members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances”. Kahn (1990) as cited in Kular Gatenby, Rees, Soane, and Truss (2008). The cognitive aspect of employee engagement is related to an employee’s beliefs about the organisation, its leaders and working conditions. The emotional aspect is about the employee’s feelings towards each of these three factors and whether they have a positive or negative attitude toward the organisation and its leaders. The physical aspect concerns the physical energies exerted by individuals to accomplish their roles. “Engagement means to be psychologically as well as physically present when occupying and performing an organisational role”. Kahn (1990) as cited in Kular Gatenby, Rees, Soane, and Truss (2008).

“Conflict exists in a relationship when parties believe that their aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously, or perceive a divergence in the values, needs or interests (latent conflict) and purposefully employ their power in an effort to eliminate, defeat, neutralise, or change each other to protect or further their interests in the interaction (manifest conflict)” (Anstey 2006: 6).

INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONDENTS:

1. Please select **ONLY ONE** response with a tick ✓ for each Likert Scale statement below.
2. Answer **ALL** the pre-coded statements in this section.
3. Please **DO NOT** leave any statement blank.

KEY: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree

		SD	D	N	A	SA
8.1	I know what is expected of me at work.	1	2	3	4	5
8.2	I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.	1	2	3	4	5
8.3	I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.	1	2	3	4	5
8.4	In the last 7 days I have received recognition and praise for doing good work.	1	2	3	4	5
8.5	My supervisor/HOD at work seems to care about me as a person.	1	2	3	4	5
8.6	There is someone at work who encourages my development.	1	2	3	4	5

8.7	At work my opinions seem to count.	1	2	3	4	5
8.8	The vision and mission of the institution makes me feel as though my job is important.	1	2	3	4	5
8.9	My fellow employees are committed to doing quality work.	1	2	3	4	5
8.10	I have a best friend at work.	1	2	3	4	5
8.11	In the last 6 months someone at work has talked to me about my progress.	1	2	3	4	5
8.12	In the past 12 months I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.	1	2	3	4	5
8.13	I trust my colleagues at DUT	1	2	3	4	5
8.14	I am constantly undermined by my fellow employees at DUT	1	2	3	4	5
8.15	My current job is cognitively demanding since it requires constant concentration.	1	2	3	4	5
8.16	I believe that the leadership of the DUT values employees' involvement in the objectives of the institution.	1	2	3	4	5

8.17	I have a positive attitude towards my job.	1	2	3	4	5
8.18	Although there is sometimes negative media coverage about the DUT, I am proud to be associated with the Institution.	1	2	3	4	5
8.19	Leadership at the DUT makes a concerted effort to improve the working conditions of staff.	1	2	3	4	5
8.20	I can use a variety of skills and knowledge in my current position.	1	2	3	4	5
9.1	If I have challenges in my current job, my line manager is supportive in assisting me.	1	2	3	4	5
9.2	In my current position I have the autonomy to solve problems.	1	2	3	4	5
9.3	Workplace conflict takes up a lot of valuable time at the DUT.	1	2	3	4	5
9.4	The processes to manage conflict are well known to all DUT staff.	1	2	3	4	5
9.5	I am often fearful of conflict situations since I am afraid to be victimised later by management.	1	2	3	4	5
9.6	The workplace conflict management structures at the DUT can resolve problems within a reasonable timeframe.	1	2	3	4	5

9.7	I often experience frustration in my present job due to the inability of my colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
9.8	I get frustrated daily as a result of a lack of infrastructure at the DUT to support me in my present job.	1	2	3	4	5
9.9	In my opinion at the DUT racial differences plays an important role in conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
9.10	I often regard cultural differences at the DUT as a cause for conflict.	1	2	3	4	5
9.11	The grievance process as a conflict management tool at the DUT is effective.	1	2	3	4	5
9.12	In my opinion, line managers resort to disciplinary action too quickly without first communicating with an employee.	1	2	3	4	5
9.13	I believe that DUT provides line managers with sufficient training in how to handle conflict situations.	1	2	3	4	5
9.14	In my opinion, the unions at the DUT provide adequate support if there is a conflict situation.	1	2	3	4	5
9.15	I believe that line managers at DUT often abuse their power resulting in conflict situations to arise.	1	2	3	4	5
9.16	DUT Management does not make a concerted effort to resolve conflict timeously and often allows it to escalate.	1	2	3	4	5

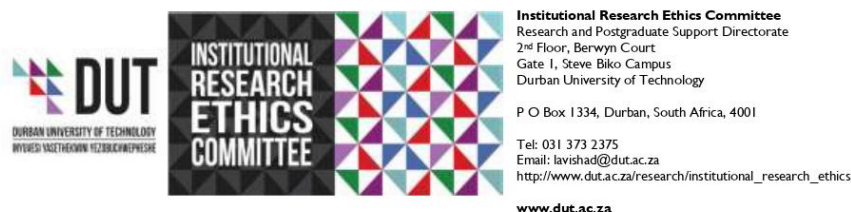
9.17	I often stay away from work even though I am not sick.	1	2	3	4	5
9.18	My line manager provides me with regular feedback on my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
9.19	In my opinion, the leadership of the Institution tends to abuse their power when dealing with staff.	1	2	3	4	5
9.20	The DUT places enough emphasis on employee-wellbeing (e.g. managing workplace stress and challenges).	1	2	3	4	5
10.1	Often, I feel as if my voice is not heard at the DUT.	1	2	3	4	5
10.2	I know exactly what is expected of me on a daily basis at the DUT.	1	2	3	4	5
10.3	I believe that the DUT undertakes pro-active planning and involves staff in this process.	1	2	3	4	5
10.4	I believe that leadership development is a priority at the DUT.	1	2	3	4	5
10.5	The current communication processes at the DUT are suited to the rapid changes that the Institution is facing.	1	2	3	4	5
10.6	I believe that joint decision making at the Institution does not receive the attention it deserves.	1	2	3	4	5

10.7	The culture of the DUT promotes a shared responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5
10.8	Although staff at the DUT are encouraged to participate in decision making, there is a general climate of distancing oneself from these processes.	1	2	3	4	5
10.9	DUT regards professional development as an individual responsibility and not that of the Institution.	1	2	3	4	5
10.10	My workload has doubled in the last five years.	1	2	3	4	5
10.11	I often struggle with work related stress.	1	2	3	4	5
10.12	In my experience I have received sufficient coaching at the DUT to fully understand what is expected of me in my present job.	1	2	3	4	5
10.13	I believe that a mentorship programme will benefit staff at the DUT.	1	2	3	4	5
10.14	I am motivated to do my best on a daily basis.	1	2	3	4	5
10.15	In my opinion the salary structure of the DUT is equitable in comparison to other Higher Education Institutions.	1	2	3	4	5
10.16	I feel motivated by the career opportunities provided at the DUT.	1	2	3	4	5

10.17	Performance is measured fairly at the DUT.	1	2	3	4	5
10.18	Innovation is emphasised at the DUT.	1	2	3	4	5
10.19	I often feel stressed because of the performance targets that I am expected to achieve.	1	2	3	4	5
10.20	The current infrastructure at the DUT is hampering my performance.	1	2	3	4	5
11.1	I will not hesitate to recommend the DUT to anyone seeking employment.	1	2	3	4	5
11.2	I will recommend the DUT as a Higher Education Institution to anyone wishing to further their studies.	1	2	3	4	5
11.3	I am excited to go to work on a daily basis since I regard my job as meaningful.	1	2	3	4	5
11.4	I often think of resigning from DUT or looking for alternative employment.	1	2	3	4	5
11.5	One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice	1	2	3	4	5

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION!

ANNEXURE C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER (IREC)



6 October 2022

Mr B D Tayler
31 Walter Short Road
Scottsville
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Mr Tayler

The influence of employee engagement on managing workplace conflict at the Durban University of Technology
Ethics Clearance Number: IREC 269/21

The DUT-Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of your data collection tool.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the DUT-IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the DUT-IREC according to the DUT-IREC SOP's.

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the DUT-IREC as outlined in the DUT-IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely


Professor J K Adam
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

ANNEXURE D: SEKARAN AND BOUGIE'S COMPUTED TABLE

Annexure D

TABLE FOR DETERMINING SAMPLE SIZE FROM A GIVEN TARGET POPULATION SIZE

NOTES:

- The candidate should still explain briefly in the Research Methodology Chapter the Target Population obtained from a Source List and the various SAMPLING TECHNIQUES with recent author references.
- Students can also use Sekaran and Bougie (2014:268) - **Sample size for a given population size**. This is perfectly acceptable to use and explained clearly.
- This comes under the numbered heading: **SELECTION OF THE SAMPLE**.
- If the target population is small, e.g. only 100 or even 140 elements, then it is pointless selecting a sample. In this case use the SURVEY METHOD to include all the target respondents for the study. It also increases your response rate.

KEY: N = TARGET POPULATION

S = SAMPLE SIZE (n = xx).

SAMPLE SIZE FOR A GIVEN POPULATION SIZE (95% C.I.)

N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	220	140	1 200	291
15	14	230	144	1 300	297
20	19	240	148	1 400	302
25	24	250	152	1 500	306
30	28	260	155	1 600	310
35	32	270	159	1 700	313
40	36	280	162	1 800	317
45	40	290	165	1 900	320
50	44	300	169	2 000	322
55	48	320	175	2 200	327
60	52	340	181	2 400	331
65	56	360	186	2 600	335
70	59	380	191	2 800	338
75	63	400	196	3 000	341
80	66	420	201	3 500	346
85	70	440	205	4 000	351
90	73	460	210	4 500	354
95	76	480	214	5 000	357
100	80	500	217	6 000	361

110	86	550	226	7 000	364
120	92	600	234	8 000	367
130	97	630	242	9 000	368
140	103	700	248	10 000	370
150	108	750	254	15 000	375
160	113	800	260	20 000	377
170	118	850	265	30 000	379
180	123	900	269	40 000	380
190	127	950	274	50 000	381
200	132	1 000	278	75 000	382
210	136	1 100	285	1 000 000	384

Source: Sekaran, U. and Bougie, R. 2014. *Research Methods for Business: A Skill-Building Approach*. 6th Edition. New York: Wiley: 268.

ANNEXURE E: LETTER OF INFORMATION



ANNEXURE E

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: The influence of employee engagement on managing workplace conflict at the Durban University of Technology.

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Brent Damian Tayler (PGD in IR and HRM (UN))

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Supervisor: Dr M Lourens (PHD HRM)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The study focuses on investigating employee engagement strategies at the DUT. Furthermore, the study explores how these strategies will impact on workplace conflict at the institution.

Good Day. I trust you are well.

I am a post graduate student at the DUT conducting research for my Masters' degree in Management Sciences: Human Resource Management

I would like to invite you to participate in the research by completing an online questionnaire. Completing the questionnaire will take no more than 15-20 minutes of your time.

What is Research: Research is a systematic search or enquiry for generalized new knowledge. It is the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge in a new and creative way so as to generate new concepts, methodologies and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to the extent that it leads to new and creative outcomes. As a participant, you are entitled to ask as many questions as you wish in order to fully understand the study. You are entitled to discuss the study with family members and friends and are under no obligation to commit at this stage.

Outline of the Procedures: As a respondent / participant at the DUT you will be requested to complete a questionnaire independently and honestly within the allocated time frame. By completing the questionnaire, it is assumed that you are aware of the purpose of the study and have given consent to participate in the study. Selected respondents / participants will be interviewed to obtain their opinion on the research topic.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: The risk involved in this research is minimal. If any of the questions are found to be embarrassing, offensive or of a sensitive nature, you may choose not to answer them. However, the answers to the questionnaire are confidential (see confidentiality section) and your identity will be anonymous.

The reasons participants may withdraw from the Study: Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw or terminate at any time.

Benefits: The information that is obtained from the study will be used for academic purposes only. It is expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject and create opportunities for further research.

30 August 2022

Remuneration: You will not receive any remuneration for taking part in the study.

Costs of the Study: You will not be expected to cover any costs towards the study. The researcher will fund the study.

Confidentiality: The questionnaire is completed anonymously, and the researcher and his or her statistician are the only persons who will see the results of the questionnaires. The researcher will not have knowledge of which scores belong to which participants as aggregate scores will be analysed. Data from the study will be presented in the thesis. However, at no time will the name of the institution, respondent or any identifying information be reported in the presentation of the research unless permission is obtained in writing to do so.

Results: A summarized version of the outcome of the study will be sent to you. If there are any significant findings during the course of the study these will be conveyed to you via your email address.

Research-related Injury: The study will not cause any harm whatsoever since it is not injury related.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings: Electronic questionnaires will be kept on a separate USB and hard-drive and saved in ONE Drive as well for a period of 5 years after which the researcher will delete the information. The data will be password protected and only the researcher will have access to it.

Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries: Please contact the supervisor, Dr Melanie Lourens (083 553 8640) or the researcher, Mr B. Tayler (082 558 9903), or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Dr L Langaniso on 031 373 2577 or researchdirector@dut.ac.za.

General: Participation in the study is voluntary and all information obtained will be confidential.

30 August 2022

ANNEXURE F: GATEKEEPERS' LETTER



*Directorate for Research and Postgraduate Support
Durban University of Technology
Open House
P.O. Box 1334, Durban 4000
Tel.: 031-3732576/7
Fax: 031-3732946*

5th September 2022

Mr Brent Tayler
c/o Department of Human Resources Management
Faculty of Management Sciences
Durban University of Technology

Dear Mr Tayler

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE DUT

Your email correspondence in respect of the above refers. I am pleased to inform you that the Institutional Research and Innovation Committee (IRIC) has granted **Gatekeeper Permission** for you to conduct your research "The influence of employee engagement on managing workplace conflict at the Durban University of Technology." at the Durban University of Technology. **Kindly note that this letter must be issued to the IREC for approval before you commence data collection.**

The DUT may impose any other condition it deems appropriate in the circumstances having regard to nature and extent of access to and use of information requested.

We would be grateful if a summary of your key research findings would be submitted to the IRIC on completion of your studies.

Kind regards.
Yours sincerely

MS V GOVENDER
ACTING-DIRECTOR: RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT DIRECTORATE

EDITOR'S LETTER

Researchers Beyond-Borders (PTY) LTD
Umhlanga, Durban
South Africa
4 March 2025

To whom it may concern

Editing of Master's dissertation: Brent Damian Tayler (Student number -19402046)

Title of dissertation: The influence of employee engagement on managing workplace conflict at the Durban University of Technology

This letter serves as confirmation that the aforementioned dissertation has been language edited.
Any queries may be directed to the author of this letter.



Regards

Maleni Pillay
Researchers Beyond-Borders
consult@researchersbeyondborders.com
www.researchersbeyondborders.com